



ANDALUSIA

UMAYYAD ROUTE



Umayyad Route

Project funded by the EUROPEAN UNION

ENPI CBCMED

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Madinat al-Zahra, Cordoba

The ENPI Project

The Umayyad Route seeks to publicize the profound human, cultural, artistic and scientific relationship between East and West and the way in which the Greco-Roman legacy was passed on to Europe through al-Andalus. This route was the path along which the Arabs came to the Iberian Peninsula and Europe, but it was also a channel for the transfer of knowledge and perfectly illustrates the close collaboration between the two Cultures. Of these multiple contacts the most important things to have survived the wear and tear of history are a common cultural and artistic background, a shared history and heritage. This is the raison d'être of these routes, which seek to forge links and strengthen the relations between the different peoples they encompass, united by a common past.

The Umayyad Route retraces part of the journey followed by the dynasty founded by Muawiya ibn Abi Sufian from its capital in Damascus and its subsequent expansion along the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the Iberian Peninsula. The route begins therefore in the Near East before heading off along the Mediterranean across North Africa. It follows the path by which Arabic civilization came to Europe and which gave rise to the Caliphate of Cordoba, where the Hispano-Muslim civilization flourished for several centuries. The itinerary starts at its easternmost point in Jordan and Lebanon, passing through Egypt and Tunisia, with a stopover in Sicily, and ends up in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal).

The Umayyads in Andalusia

The arrival of Muslim troops in the Iberian Peninsula at the beginning of the eighth century marked the birth of a new era that proved fundamental in the history of Spain in general and of Andalusia in particular.

The native population offered very little resistance to their conquerors from overseas due to their internal weakness and the ongoing crisis at the time within the Visigoth monarchy. With the establishment of al-Andalus, the name given to this new province of the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus, a long process of Arabization and Islamization of the local population began.

Muslim rule endured longest in what is today Andalusia and this is where the legacy of al-Andalus is clearest and most spectacular.

The Project for the Route of the Umayyads in Andalusia reveals the cultural, artistic and human relationship between al-Andalus and the Arab-Muslim Orient and the historical legacy conserved today in many Andalusian towns. This Route invites visitors to the region to discover part of the history, the splendid monuments, the arts and crafts and the culinary traditions of the different towns in Andalusia that have taken part in this European project.

The constant links and exchanges between al-Andalus and the Orient related with the Umayyads began with the arrival in al-Andalus of Abd al-Rahman I, the grandson of the Umayyad Caliph Hisham, who had miraculously escaped from the massacre of his family in Damascus. After a hazardous journey he finally reached the Iberian Peninsula, where he established a new Emirate, so founding a branch of the Umayyad dynasty in the West.



Detail of decoration from the Caliphate era. Cordoba Archaeology Museum

The new conquerors that landed in 711 brought with them new political and cultural systems, a new language, a new religion and different ways of life and of thinking.

This was continued by the Umayyads, who chose Cordoba as the capital of the new centre of power of al-Andalus. The simple early Mosque was enlarged and embellished by the Umayyad Emirs and Caliphs and had clear architectural parallels with the Mosque of Kairouan in Tunisia or the great Umayyad Mosque in



Great Mosque of Cordoba

Damascus. The Umayyads also built many *alcazabas* or castles in al-Andalus, as well as wonderful monumental complexes such as the palace city of Madinat al-Zahra.

Many towns and cities in Andalusia played important roles during this period: Algeciras *(al-Djazirat al-Khadra)* as the gate to the narrow Strait between Europe and Africa, with its close trading links with the Maghreb, and Seville *(Ishbiliya)* with its unbeatable position on the Guadalquivir (or "great river"), ideal for both maritime and inland trade. Some inland towns such as Carmona *(Qarmuna)*, Écija *(Istichcha)* or Medina Sidonia *(Madinat Siduna)* became the capitals of their *coras* or provinces, while cities such as Málaga *(Malaqa)*, Almería (al-Mariya), Fuengirola *(Suhail)*, Niebla *(Labla)* and *Madinat Ilbira* near Granada, also thrived.

These and other towns were the scene of amazing, intensive building work involving the construction of impressive walled precincts in both urban and rural areas, as well as bridges, baths, waterwheels, water channels, shipyards, etc.

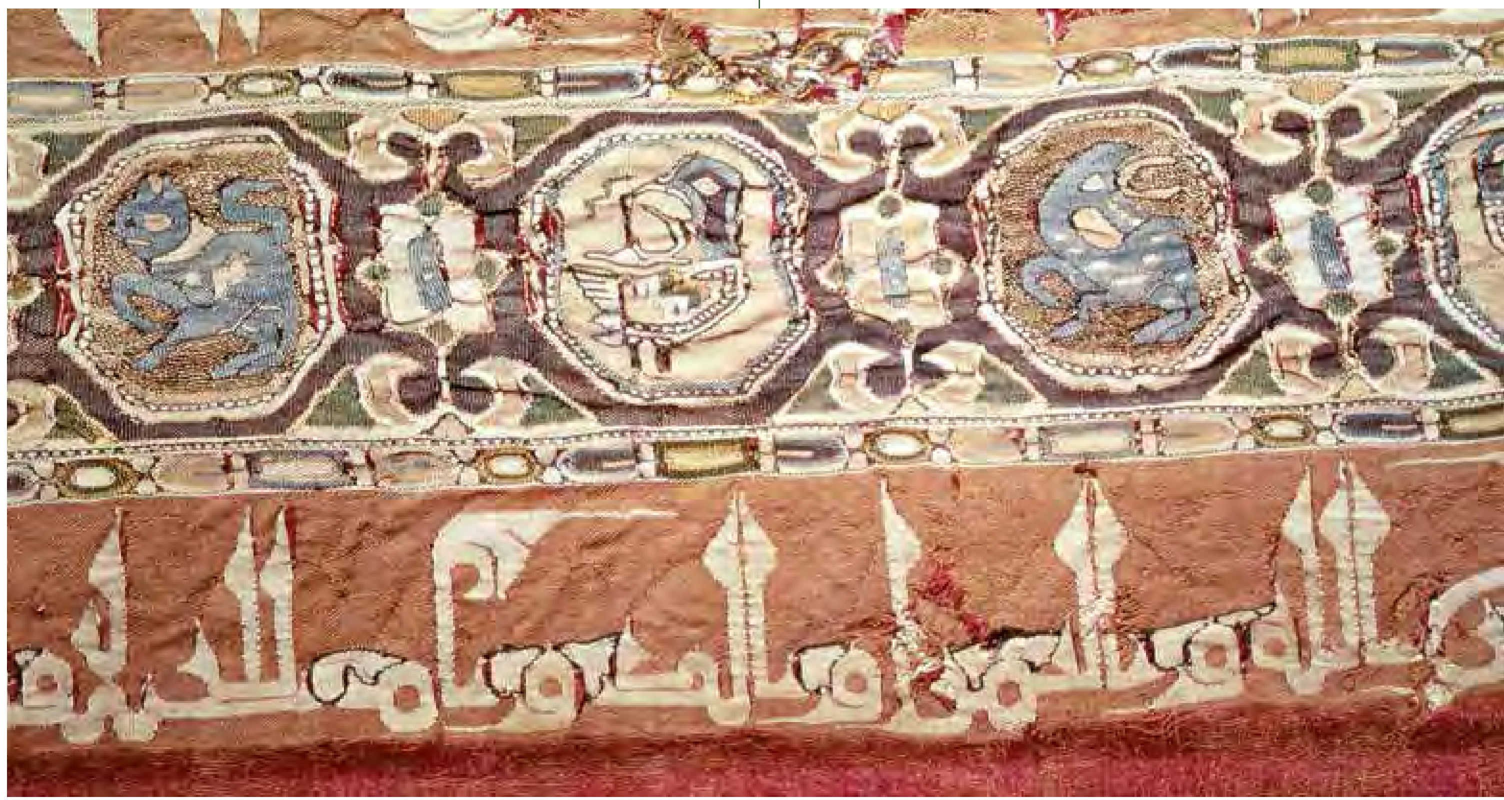
The existing natural resources, the cultivation of land and the use of rivers that were well supplied with mills for grinding wheat into flour with which to feed the population, undoubtedly contributed to the economic success of al-Andalus. The introduction of new crops and new agricultural techniques, together with the extension of irrigated land, created prosperous forms of agriculture in many of these towns.

This dramatic economic development thanks to agriculture and the exploitation of other natural resources such as mining and fishing, guaranteed the State the necessary resources to promote a broad-based, diverse industrial sector, which would soon become very famous supplying products that were in great demand and highly valued in many distant lands.



Tarifa from the Strait of Gibraltar

Head-dress of Hisham II, Spanish Royal Academy of History



Al-Andalus became the well-spring of a splendid array of art forms especially in the 10th century with exquisite architectural adornments and sumptuous objects of exceptional artistic value.

An Andalusian art with Oriental roots, a symbol of refinement and luxury, which on occasions assimilated shapes and techniques that were almost identical to those used on the other side of the Mediterranean. The technical mastery of many Oriental craftsmen was passed on to the workshops of al-Andalus, which spread and developed many of these skills, so creating a Hispano-Muslim aesthetic with its own individual personality.



Al-Andalus in the 10th century

Magnificent silk fabrics, gold and silver jewellery, exquisite ivory carvings, glazed ceramic dishes, emblematic pieces in metal, glass and leather, etc., were just some of the characteristic objects of this period in al-Andalus. These products proved very successful and were soon exported to other states. They are now works of art of the finest quality, many of which can still be seen today in famous museums around the world.

The military and political successes were echoed in important advances in society and culture. *Qurtuba* (Cordoba), the Umayyad capital, was home during the al-Andalus period to such illustrious figures as Ziryab, Ibn Hazm, al-Zahrawi, Ibn Firnas and Averroes. Literature, botany, music, medicine, astronomy and philosophy were amongst a wide range of fields in which the scholars of al-Andalus excelled.

Under the Umayyad Dynasty, Cordoba enjoyed a period of unrivalled splendour, in which it became the great city of the Islamic West and may well have been the most highly populated city in the Early Middle Ages. Its brilliant economic, intellectual and artistic life reached a peak during the reigns of Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam II, thanks to a long period of political stability and to monarchs who were keen to promote the enrichment and embellishment of their realms.

In the tenth century during the Umayyad Caliphate, al-Andalus played a leading role in international relations with a thriving economy that enabled it to conduct busy international trade with many ports in North Africa, Sicily, Crete and Egypt.

With the arrival of the Umayyads in the Iberian Peninsula, many of the skills and wisdom of the East were brought to al-Andalus and from there to the rest of Europe. In the science field, part of the valuable classical and oriental legacy was passed on to the Christian kingdoms to the north. New discoveries in the fields of astronomy, botany, medicine and the development of new disciplines and technologies



Manuscript from Caliph Al-Hakam II's Library. Cordoba. 10th century.

Below, Madinat al-Zahra archaeological site



On the right, ivory box. Workshop in Cordoba, 15th century. National Archaeology Museum



that first emerged in the Orient, produced a dazzling explosion of creativity. Paper and silk also reached Cordoba in the 9th century, with the first astrolabes and compasses arriving soon afterwards. We also know that the first scientific translations were made in the middle of the tenth century.

The relations between al-Andalus and Byzantium were also strengthened so continuing the same traditions as the original Oriental Umayyad Dynasty. This led to the 'Byzantinization' of Cordoba. The *mihrab* of the Mosque or the gift by the Byzantine Emperor to the Caliph of Cordoba of the classical Greek treatise *De Materia Medica* by Dioscorides so that it could be translated into Arabic, laid the foundations for the subsequent flourishing of agriculture and medicine in al-Andalus.

This period was also important for human and cultural relations, something that was to mark the historic progression of Andalusia, enriching and promoting a valuable and important cultural diversity. A return journey across the length and breadth of the Mediterranean to share a common history with many links and bonds with the other territories and cultures in this project. A rich, extensive shared past which in this guide explores a part of Andalusia, which we would now like to remember and share in the form of this itinerary.



Sundial. 10th century. Museum of the Alhambra



Fawn. Fountain water-spout. Cordoba, 10th century. Archaeology Museum



The book by Dioscorides is presented to Abd al-Rahman III. Dionisio Baixeras. Barcelona University

"All lands in their diversity are one
and all men are neighbours and brothers".

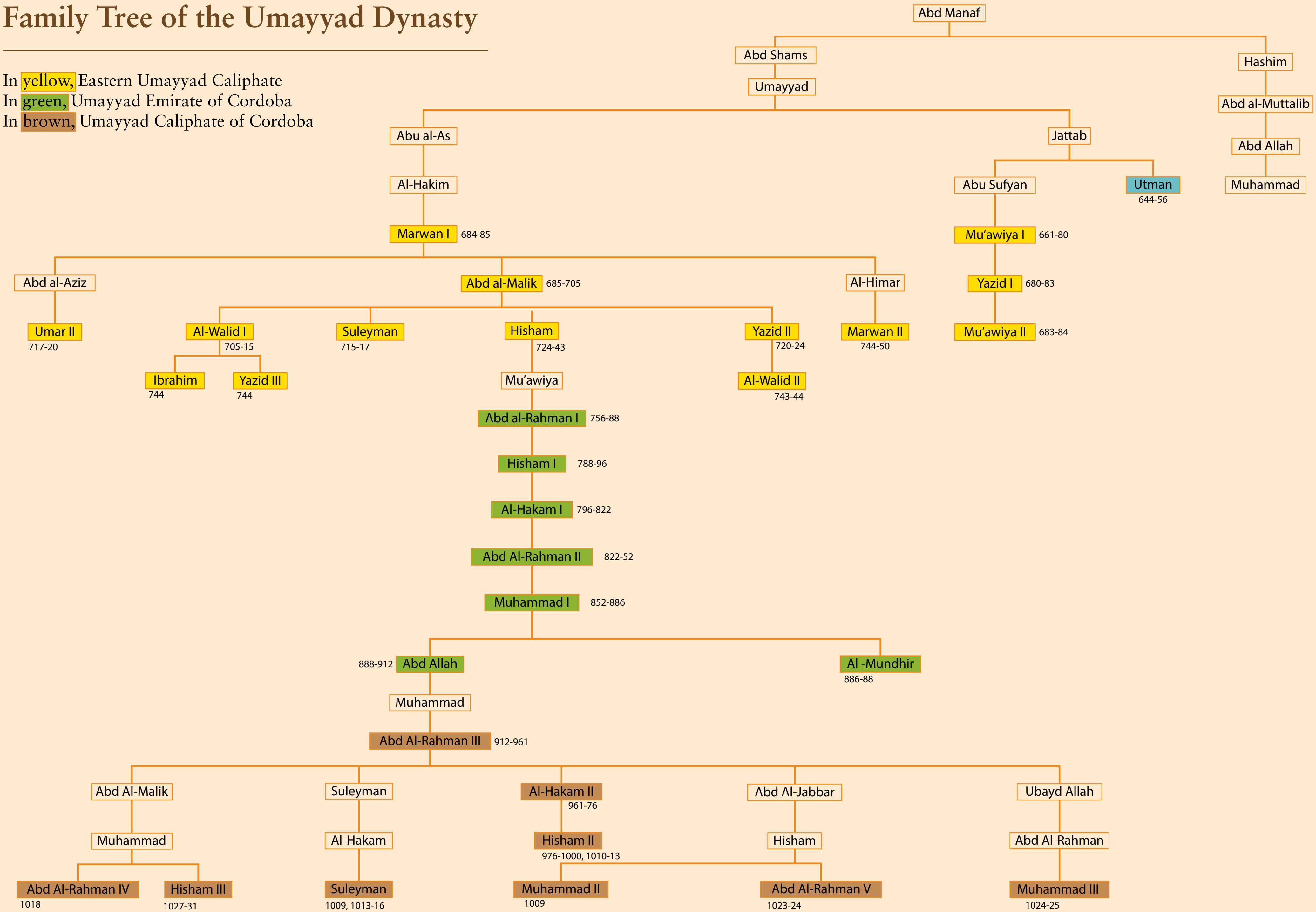
Al-Zubaydi, tutor of the Umayyad Caliph
al-Hakam II (10th century).

Umayyad Route



Family Tree of the Umayyad Dynasty

In yellow, Eastern Umayyad Caliphate
In green, Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba
In brown, Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba



The Umayyad Route in Andalusia



ITINERARY

UMAYYAD ROUTE

Algeciras



1. Archaeological Park of the Marinid Walls
2. Marinid Royal Baths
3. Municipal Museum
4. Parish Church of Nuestra Señora de la Palma
5. Chapel of Nuestra Señora de Europa
6. San Isidro district
7. City Hall
8. Food Market

(i) Tourist information

Algeciras Tourist Office
Paseo Río de la Miel s/n
Tel. 956 571 254

Algeciras Municipal Museum
Calle Ortega y Gasset s/n
Tel. 956 570 672



Engraving showing Algeciras in the 18th century

Its position on the Strait of Gibraltar where Europe meets Africa has made the history of Algeciras a tale of ups and downs, with periods of bonanza and of successive conflicts between rivals on the opposing shores.

Al-Djazirat al-Khadra, the gateway to al-Andalus from the Maghrib, was the first city to be taken by the Muslims. After Tariq ibn Zyad disembarked in 711, Algeciras became a base for Musa Ibn Nusayr's conquests in Iberia and the founding of al-Andalus.

In times of the Emirate and the Caliphate of Cordoba, Algeciras was the capital of the *cora*, or province, and a prosperous hub for trade with the Maghreb, evidence of which can be found in its thriving shipyards.



Ancient mosque of *Las Banderas* (Flags)



Plaza Alta (High square)

Algeciras grew quickly with the construction of the walled Medina (in what is today the Old Town), a great mosque commissioned by Abd al-Rahman I and a fortress for the Governor. It prospered greatly in the 10th century, becoming one of the most important ports in al-Andalus.

During the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, the Almoravids, Almohads and Marinids turned Algeciras into one of the biggest cities in al-Andalus.

Algeciras in a 19th-century engraving with Gibraltar in the background





View of Algeciras towards 1845. Painting by L. A. Sainson

Visits

Remains of the medina and walls

The oldest part of Algeciras is the *Villa Vieja* (Old Town), the promontory situated to the south of the River Miel, opposite the *Isla Verde* (Green Island), and today part of the busy port area.

The gardens and streets of the *Villa Vieja* were once those of the *medina*, the walled town reinforced by both Almoravids and Almohads, where there were houses and impressive buildings such as the mosque –with five naves, built in the times of Abd al-Rahman I– and the *Mezquita de las Banderas* (Mosque of the Flags), close to La Puerta del Mar (The Gateway to the Sea), where it is said that “the standards of the tribes gathered together when they assembled” before setting out on the conquest of Hispania. In the late 13th century, the Marinids built a new city (*Villa Nueva*) called *al-Binya* on the other side of the river. Its remains –walls, towers, baths, etc.– are spread over what is today the María Cristina Park.

Section of the Marinid moat and bridge in the ancient city of Algeciras



Municipal Museum

Located in the House of Culture (Cultural Centre-José Luis Cano Foundation), this Museum is mainly devoted to local archaeology. It displays a whole host of Roman discoveries that reflect the busy shipping traffic in the Bay of Algeciras ever since ancient times. It also has pieces from Muslim *al-Djazira* –inscriptions, coins, oil lamps, ceramics, etc.– which help explain and reconstruct what life was like in the city at that time.



War helmet (late 13th century). Algeciras Museum



View of Africa from Algeciras

Church of Nuestra Señora de la Palma

The greatest religious monument in Algeciras was built in the Plaza Alta during the revival of the city in the 18th century. Inaugurated in 1738, this church is composed of five naves with an interior of colossal proportions with arches on robust pillars. Outside, the main façade and the slender bell tower are particularly impressive with their delicate masonry and stonework.





Right, Church of Nuestra Señora de la Palma. Above, detail of the Chapel of Europa



Weather vane on the Kursaal building and Algeciras port

Surrounding area

In addition to the city and its port, Algeciras has its wonderful bay and (why not?) Africa, a stone's throw away. Tangiers and Ceuta are in easy reach, as are the Roman ruins of *Carteia*. You can play golf in San Roque, or even visit Gibraltar, "the mountain of Tariq", where there are also many reminders of al-Andalus.

Heading towards Tarifa and inland, there are numerous open-air attractions: beaches, the hills along the N-340 road, from where you can watch migrating birds crossing the Strait, and, heading towards Los Barrios, the large protected forests of Los Alcornocales.





River Miel (Honey)

Left, Rinconcillo beach. Below, Getares beach





Algeciras lighthouse at sunset

The Geographer al-Idrisi and Algeciras

In the 12th century, al-Idrisi described the city of Algeciras in these terms:

“This town is well populated. Its walls are made of stone mixed with lime. It has three gates and an arsenal inside the town. It is traversed by a river called Miel (honey), whose waters are sweet and good, and from which its people drink. On both banks of this river there are orchards and gardens. It is a place where ships are built and a port for embarking and disembarking.”



Algeciras Aqueduct around 1830. Drawing by L.A. Sainson

Local cuisine and handicrafts

Algeciras is a lively, dynamic city. This is especially obvious in the mornings at the food market, to where the people from Algeciras and neighbouring towns flock daily to purchase fresh produce. Fish and shellfish are centre stage in this attractive, bustling market. The people of Algeciras like to cook fish in stews, grilled, battered and fried. The most typical dishes we can try include: *pescado a la algecireña* (fish Algeciras-style or *abajá*), *mero en amarillo* (grouper in yellow sauce), noodles with *coquinas* or clams, artichokes Algeciras-style or snails. Battered *ortiguillas* (sea anemones) are also much appreciated. As regards cakes, *pasta real de bizcocho blando* (a soft sponge cake) is a particular favourite.

Algeciras' position as a border town has produced a fantastic array of dishes with an Arab touch such as sardines a la *moruna* (Moorish style) –a version of the classic Moroccan tajine– or *pinchitos* (grilled seasoned meat on a skewer). Arab pastries made with almonds and honey are also very typical.

The craftsmen of Algeciras and indeed of the whole province of Cadiz offer the visitor a wide range of original, often unique, products; the craft markets in the streets of Algeciras and other towns in the Province of Cadiz are also worth a visit. The area is well-known for its ceramics, cork and wood products. High quality leather goods can also be found.



Square of San Isidro in Algeciras Old Town



Food Market in the square of Nuestra Señora de la Palma

Feasts

- January 5. The day before Twelfth Night and the arrival of **the Three Wise Men**, the children in Algeciras roam the streets in a loud, raucous procession, dragging cans tied to a string as accompaniment. The whole city is filled with noise as the kids head for the port, where the Three Wise Men disembark, loaded down with sweets.
- **Holy Week**. A period of intense devotion in which many religious processions are held every day with beautiful, carefully prepared *pasos* (floats with religious images) depicting different episodes in the Passion of Jesus.
- Late June, ***Feria Real*** (Royal Fair) of Algeciras, with a livestock market and highly-rated bullfights.
- July 16, Festival of ***Nuestra Señora del Carmen***. The statue of the Virgin Mary is paraded down to the port, where it is lifted onto a boat and paraded around the bay, followed by numerous fishing boats sounding their horns and launching fireworks into the sky.
- August 15, **Maritime Pilgrimage of Virgen de la Palma**. Declared of Cultural Interest of Andalusia this event takes place annually on the beach of El Rinconcillo. There is no other festival quite like it in Spain. Numerous pleasure boats are involved, taking an image of the Patron Saint out of its underwater cave and putting it on an altar in the sea for the whole day.



Panoramic view of Algeciras and Villanueva Avenue

Medina Sidonia



1. Remains of the Castle
2. Arch of Belén
3. Puerta del Sol (Sun Gate)
4. Arch of La Pastora
5. Church of Santa María la Coronada
6. Roman Archaeological Site
7. *Caballerizas* (stables) *del Duque*
8. Convent of San Cristóbal
9. Ethnographic Museum
10. Convent of Jesús, María y José
11. Town Hall
12. Chapel of Santa Ana
13. Chapel of Cristo de la Sangre
14. Remains of the Alcázar (fortress)

i Tourist Information

~~**Tourist information**~~
Tourist Office
C/ San Juan (Edif. Plaza de Abastos)
Tel. 956 412 404

Municipal Archaeological Museum
C/ Ortega, 10
Tel. 956 423 017

Ethnographic Museum
C/ Altamirano, 10
Tel. 956 410 013



Arch of Belén

Steeped in tradition, Medina Sidonia is often said to be one of the towns with most character in southern Andalusia.

Formerly known as *Assido* and located on a strategic crossroads between the mountains, the plains and the coast, its origins date back to the Phoenicians, Romans and Visigoths.

It gained in importance in the times of al-Andalus, when it became the capital of the province, with an Arab aristocracy and mainly Berber population. According to chronicles from the Almoravid and Almohad periods, *Madinat Saduna* (also known as *Abu Salim*) was noted for its ramparts, the remains of which, such as the Arch of La Pastora or the Gate of Belén, show today just how important the town once was. The Church of Santa Maria la Coronada embellishes its charming town centre.



Medina Sidonia seen from the Castle hill

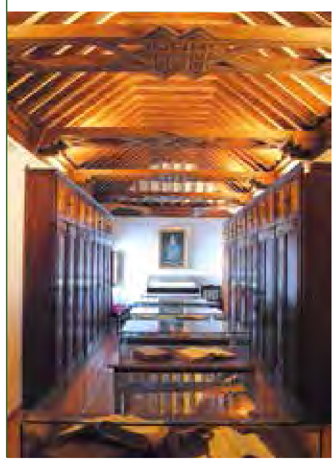


Archaeological remains of *Villa Vieja* (Old Town)

Medina Sidonia remained a military stronghold until the end of the Middle Ages. In order to guarantee its defence, it was given to the military order of Santa María de España, and, later on, to that of Santiago. Finally in the mid-15th century, Juan II presented it to the Guzmán family, the Counts of Niebla, and since 1445 the Dukes of Medina Sidonia, one of the most powerful titles in Spanish nobility.

These noblemen ensured that Medina was embellished with luxurious palaces, churches and convents, which today make up one of the most interesting and attractive groups of monuments in the province of Cádiz.

Historical Archive





Caballerizas (stables) of the Duke

Visits

Castle, walls and gates

The medieval town was dominated by the castle built on the top of the hill adjoining the perimeter walls. It was built in Umayyad times on top of ancient Roman foundations between the 8th and 10th centuries, and subsequently renovated by Muslims and Christians. Parts of its central section survive today, namely the *alcázar* (fortress), with a double bend entrance and the Tower of Doña Blanca, which housed the local council chamber in the 16th century. Nearby, we come to the remains of *La Villa Vieja* (the Old Town) and the arch or Gate of Belén, close to the *Caballerizas del Duque* (stables). Where the perimeter walls once stood, there are now remains of walls and towers, as well as the *Puerta del Sol* (Gate of the Sun) and the *Arco de la Pastora*, the most important and best preserved gate, a splendid 10th-century stone construction with a double horseshoe arch.

Below, Tower of Doña Blanca. On the right, Arch of *La Pastora* (shepherdess)





Church of Santa María la Coronada

The largest church in Medina Sidonia is still the nerve centre of the oldest quarter of the city. Located on the site of the former mosque, construction began in the late 15th century, and ended in the 16th. The bell tower is a later addition.

The church is considered an excellent example of later stages of the "Aristocratic Gothic" style, with certain Plateresque features. It has an elegant interior with elaborate stellar vaults in the transept and choir, and a striking artistic altarpiece with mid-16th-century sculptures.





Above and left, Main Church of Santa María la Coronada

Ethnographic Museum

This interesting exhibition space hosts an important collection of everyday domestic objects and goods that transports the visitor back to the traditional way of life and the customs of the people of Medina Sidonia over the last centuries.

Ethnographic Museum







Above, Roman sewers in the Archaeological Museum. Right, Ethnographic Museum

Roman Archaeological Museum

Walking along Calle Espíritu Santo, near the *Arco de La Pastora*, we will soon come to a fascinating collection of 1st-century underground Roman galleries. This was once a complex system of drains and water channels, with a vaulted main passage. The sheer size of this underworld indicates how important the town was at that time and offers an unusual testimony to the past, which captivates the visitor with the originality of its spaces and the expert precision with which it was built.

Archaeological Museum. Roman water system





Left, View of Medina Sidonia from Santa María La Coronada. Below, sunset



Medina Sidonia in the al-Andalus era

The province or *Cora* of Sidona (*Kurat Siduna*) bordered to the north with those of Niebla, Seville and Morón, and to the south with Algeciras. During the 9th and 10th centuries, it enjoyed a period of intellectual splendour alongside the flourishing *Calsena* and Jerez.

Surrounding area

With a wide panoramic view of the mountains and the Atlantic coast at its feet, there are plenty of interesting places to explore, such as archaeological sites, the old Monastery of El Cuervo, the splendid wild areas in the Alcornocales Natural Park and the fields in which fighting bulls are raised.



A view of the area around Medina Sidonia



Panoramic view of the town

The *Ruta del Toro* (Route of the Bull)

Medina Sidonia is the starting point on a route that passes through Benalup, Paterna, Alcalá and Castellar to Jimena, leading us through meadows and pastures where many of Spain's most famous fighting bulls graze. There are also numerous herds of *retinto* cattle, the resistant native breed that is perfectly adapted to the local environment. The imposing grandeur of the majestic *toros bravos* (fighting bulls) is an inseparable feature of this rural and mountain landscape, dotted with the white painted farmsteads where the bulls are reared. The information point for Los Alcornocales Natural Park in Medina offers a detailed view of this ancient form of farming, which is so characteristic of this region.



Native breed of cattle



Traditional baskets and hampers

Local cuisine and handicrafts

The gastronomic history of Medina Sidonia is full of flavours and aromas, so there are countless places all over the town where the visitor can enjoy excellent stews whose main ingredients often grow wild in nearby forests. Examples include cabbage stew, *puchero*, thistle stew, artichoke stew or rice and asparagus stew, among many others.

In terms of meat, the variety of dishes on offer is multiplied both by the wide range of products and by the many subtle nuances that can bring local recipes to life. Typical products cooked in many different ways include: game (rabbit, hare, venison, partridge, wild boar...), poultry (chicken, turkey, duck, pheasant...), pork products (*chicharrones* –pork rinds–, tenderloin, ribs, chops...) or beef (*retinto* meat, oxtail, steaks...). The typical plates of snails and *cabrillas* (larger snails) in tomato sauce are also delicious.



Scrambled eggs with wild asparagus



Medina Sidonia cuisine is also influenced by its proximity to the coast. Fish dishes abound in both quality and variety. Shellfish, white fish (cod and ratatouille stew), oily fish, clams, mussels, squids and cuttlefish are just some of the irresistible options.

The town's cakes –unmistakably of al-Andalus origin– also deserve special mention, with the popular *alfajores*, delicious *amarguillos* –made by cloistered nuns– and the *tortas pardas*, *piñonates*, *yemas*…

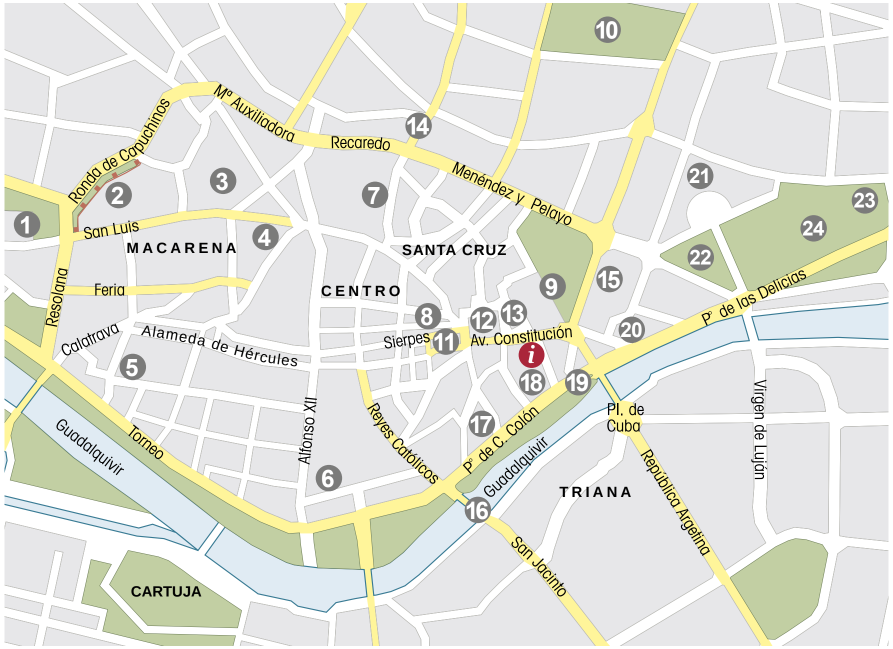
Above, preparation of *tortas pardas*. Right, traditional pastry cook



Feasts

- February, the **Carnival**, celebrated with a great fancy-dress ball and the burning of *Piti* the Witch.
- **Holy Week**, the most interesting processions are on Maundy Thursday.
- May 3, celebration of the ***Cruces de Mayo*** (May Crosses), in the parish Church of San Juan de Dios.
- June, the **Fair** with cattle shows and a competition of thoroughbred Spanish horses.
- July, **"Cultural Summer"** activities, with performances, soirées and parties.
- September, ***romería* (pilgrimage) of Virgen de Loreto** to the Chapel of Los Santos Mártires.

Seville



1. *Cinco Llagas* Hospital
2. Arab walls of La Macarena
3. Church of Santa Paula
4. *Las Dueñas* palace
5. Santa Clara
6. Museum of Fine Arts
7. *Casa de Pilatos* (Pilate's House)
8. Church of El Salvador
9. *Real Alcázar* (royal fortress)
10. *La Buhaira* gardens
11. City Hall
12. Cathedral
13. Archive of the Indies
14. Remains of the Aqueduct
15. University of Seville
16. Triana Bridge
17. Bullring
18. Royal Stables
19. *Torre del Oro* (Gold Tower)
20. San Telmo Palace
21. *Plaza de España* (Square of Spain)
22. María Luisa Park
23. Archaeological Museum
24. Museum of Popular Arts and Customs

i Tourist Information

Tourist Office
Avda. de la Constitución, 21
Tel. 954 787 579

Tourist Office
(Santa Justa train station)
Avda. de Kansas City, s/n
Tel. 954 782 002

Archaeological Museum of Seville
Plaza de América s/n
Tel. 955 120 632

Museum of Fine Arts of Seville
Plaza del Museo, 9
Tel. 955 542 942

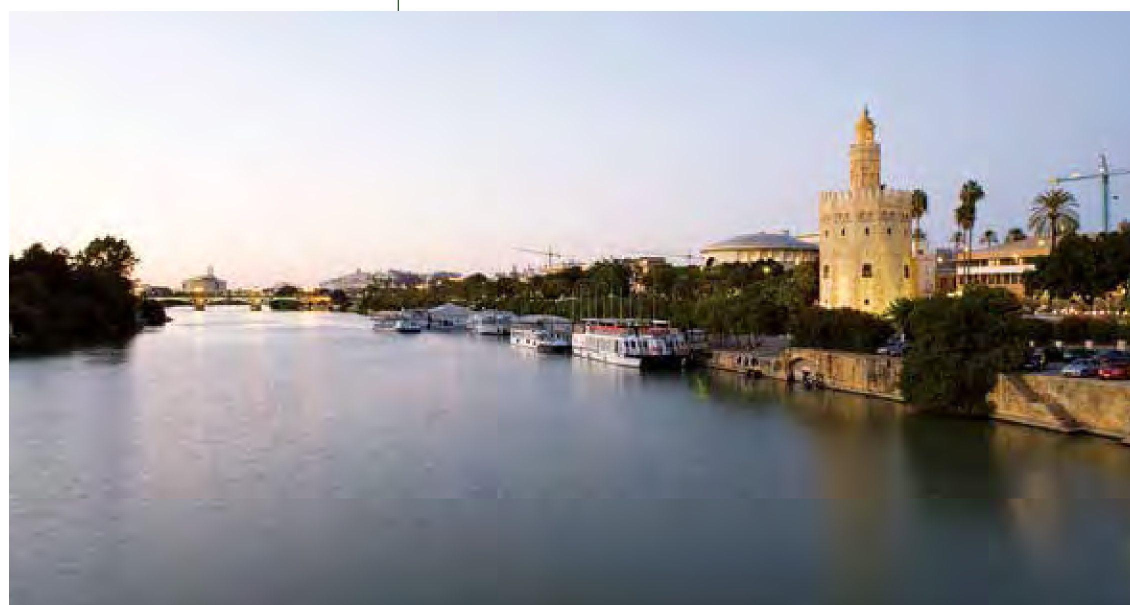


View of Seville in an ancient engraving by Münster (16th century)

Seville's roots date back more than three thousand years, to a time of hazy myth and legend when it is said that "Hercules founded it", at a strategic point where the Guadalquivir opens us to the Atlantic, a perfect position for the development of terrestrial and maritime trade. It blossomed in the early centuries of the first millennium BC, as part of the Kingdom of Tartessus, within the orbit of the Phoenician colonies. The Carthaginians were later succeeded by the Romans, who called the city *Hispalis*, one of the capitals of the prosperous Roman province of Baetica, alongside its neighbour and aristocratic rival, Italica, the birth-place of Emperors Trajan and Hadrian.

Conquered by the Muslims in 712, it was the short-lived capital of the nascent state of al-Andalus before it was moved to Cordoba. *Ishbiliya*, the Seville of al-Andalus, saw Cordoba as a powerful rival and frequently rebelled against its rulers. In the end, with the decline of the Caliphate of Cordoba, it regained its splendour under the Abbadid dynasty, who made

The River Guadalquivir on its way through Seville past the Gold Tower





View of 16th century Seville from the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*

it the seat of the court and the most powerful of the *taifa* kingdoms. Al-Mutadid and his son, al-Mutamid, the famous poet-king, ruled during this golden age and ushered in a period of flourishing arts and culture. The city's rise continued under the Maghreb empires of the Almoravids and the Almohads, who laid out much of the city we know today. This period of splendour of al-Andalus ended in 1248 with the surrender to the Christian King Fernando III. Centuries later, the discovery of America turned the city into a bridgehead towards the New World, and people from all backgrounds came to settle here.



La Buhaira Gardens

Gold Tower



Writers, painters, musicians, draftsmen or travellers like Washington Irving, Miguel de Cervantes and Machado, will always be associated with the city of Seville as will fictional characters such as Carmen or Don Juan.

Visits

Guadalquivir

The *Big River*, the Guadalquivir, acts as a broad open façade for the historical old city and is a great starting point for any visit to Seville. The mark of al-Andalus is evident here too, offering a slightly oriental scent which floats in the air and in the city's streets and monuments.

Gold Tower

Built around 1221 by the Almohads, the Tower is made of stone blocks, with a turret of bricks and tiles. Although originally part of the city's defensive system, today it houses an interesting Naval Museum, which emphasizes Seville's long-standing close relationship with sailing and the sea.



Patio de las Doncellas (Maids' courtyard). *Real Alcázar*

The *Real Alcazar* (Royal Fortress)

The *Real Alcázar* is laid out as an extensive fortified palace complex. Built according to al-Andalus construction patterns, it is the result of the repeated addition of new buildings and adaptation of existing ones to form a delightful labyrinth of spaces, styles and materials. From the construction of the *dar al-Imara*, (House of the Governor) on top of the foundations of other buildings and previous fortifications, at the beginning of the 9th century, the Abbadid Kings, the Almohads and later Alphonso X, Alphonso XI, Pedro I, the Catholic Kings, Charles V, Philip V and Isabel II all made important changes. The original construction can be seen in the outer walls, around the courtyard known as the *Patio de Banderas*. The main entrance, the Lion's Gate, leads immediately to the Hall of Justice, decorated in the fine Mudejar filigree of the 14th century and to the *Patio del Yeso* (plasterwork), flanked by the arcades of an Almohad Palace. The *Patio de la Montería* is dominated by the spectacular interior façade of the *Alcazar*, that of the Palace of Pedro I, the legendary monarch who, in the second half of the 14th century, ordered the building of a splendid private residence, the most precious jewel of Mudejar Art. Its recessed entrance leads on to the residential area, built around the lovely *Patio de las Muñecas* (Dolls). Adjoining this is the area for the King's official business, centred around the marvellous *Salon de Embajadores* (Hall of the Ambassadors), based on King al-Mutamid´s legendary Hall of Pleiades, with a domed vault, glazed tiling and arches. At the doorway, the *Patio de las Doncellas* (Maidens) allows natural light into the royal chambers and communicates with the Gothic palace built by Alphonso X and later refurbished. Beyond lies the exuberant vegetation of the Alcazar´s gardens.



Patio del Yeso (plaster courtyard), ancient Islamic Palace in the *Real Alcázar*



Salón de Embajadores (Hall of Ambassadors). Interior of the *Real Alcázar*



Gardens in the *Real Alcázar*

Seville Cathedral

The largest church in Christendom was built on top of the Great Mosque constructed by the Almohads at the end of the 12th century. Standing on an enormous rectangular plot of land at the front of the slender Giralda Minaret, some parts of the original building survive, such as the Courtyard of the Orange Trees where the Muslims performed their ablutions, with its galleries of pointed horseshoe arches. The tower, symbolizing the Spanish-Muslim heritage and mixture of cultures, was constructed in the time of the Almohad caliphs, Yusuf and al-Mansur and was completed in 1198. In 1568 Hernán Ruiz added a Renaissance belfry, crowned by a weather vane with the figure which gives it its name: La Giralda



View of La Giralda at night



The Cathedral and La Giralda



Courtyard of the Orange Trees, in the Cathedral



Royal dockyards



Mesón del Moro. Ancient Arab baths

The Viking attack on Seville

In the mid-9th century during the Umayyad period the appearance of Viking pirates spread terror amongst the people of Seville. The Arab chronicles of that period tell of the raids made by Normans disembarking in Spain. The "North men" or *Machus* ("fire worshipers") as they were known by the people of al-Andalus, first appeared on the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula in the year 844. On August 20, fifty-four Norman vessels and many small boats appeared on the Tagus river estuary and began attacking and pillaging Lisbon. Shortly afterwards, looking for a navigable river, more than eighty ships sailed up the Guadalquivir to Seville. With no defensive walls at that time, the city offered little resistance and had to be evacuated. The Vikings spent the next seven days plundering Seville. This event had a great impact on the Umayyad ruler Abd al-Rahman II in Cordoba, who ordered the strengthening of Seville's defences, the expansion of the al-Andalus fleet and the construction of new shipyards and dockyards.

Santa Cruz quarter and the City Centre

The Santa Cruz quarter, situated between the walls of the *Alcázar* (fortress) and the Mateos Gago street, is quintessential Seville. Among many suggestive corners sprinkled with shops and wineries, historic buildings such as Murillo's house and the Hospital de los Venerables stand out.

The main artery of Sevillian life is Calle Sierpes, the street that leads towards the Plaza del Duque, the heart of the city centre. This is Seville's shopping and entertainment area par excellence and it is full of all kinds of interesting attractions.





Above, Santa Cruz quarter. Left, shopping street in the City Centre

Macarena Almohad Walls



Triana and La Macarena districts

Triana, across the river, is the privileged bastion of Sevillian authenticity that attracted all the Romantic travellers without exception. At the northern end of the city, La Macarena district, lined by the Almohad walls, is home to the Basilica of the Virgin Macarena, a figure of great devotion amongst the people of Seville.



Casa de Pilatos

La Cartuja and Maria Luisa Park

To the south of the old town we come to the Baroque-style Palace of San Telmo, which is the headquarters of the Andalusian government, the ancient monastery of La Cartuja, next to the old Tobacco Factory –today the University–, the Plaza de España and Maria Luisa Park (that houses the Museum of Popular Arts and Customs and the Archaeology Museum).



Collection of al-Andalus era objects in the Seville Archaeological Museum



Mudejar Pavilion in the Maria Luisa Park (today Museum of Popular Arts and Customs)

Surrounding area

The Aljarafe

The gentle elevation –as indicated by its Arabic name *as-Sharaf* meaning hillock or high place– overlooking Seville from the west, was one of the richest and most highly praised rural areas of al-Andalus. The poets likened it to a constellation of shining white villages and hamlets in a sky of cultivated green fields of vineyards and olive groves. Nowadays, a drive through El Aljarafe takes us to countless places where the Hispano-Muslim tradition lives on in buildings, landscapes and ways of life.

Itálica

Next to Santiponce, on the N-630 highway to Mérida, we come to some of the most important Roman remains in the Iberian Peninsula: Itálica. This legendary city was founded by Scipio Africanus in 206 BC for his veteran legionaries after the final defeat of the Carthaginians on Hispanic soil. The Emperors Trajan and Hadrian were born there. The latter extended it considerably at the beginning of the 2nd century AD. After its decline in Visigoth times, Itálica was abandoned. When the Muslims arrived, they called the area *Taliqa* or *Campos de Talca*. All notion of the city's existence was lost, until it was rediscovered at the end of the Middle Ages and dubbed *Sevilla la Vieja* (Old Seville).

The amphitheatre, which is said to hold more than 20,000 spectators, is especially grand, as is the district with elegant houses with splendid floor mosaics built around central courtyards, and the remains of temples such as the *Traianeum*, baths, wells, etc. The ruins of the theatre are right next to the village of Santiponce, built in the 17th century on the earliest part of the Roman city.



Ancient minaret of Cuatrovitas, in Bollullos de la Mitación, in the Aljarafe region

Drawing of a Roman mosaic from Italica, by Alexandre de Laborde (19th century)





Tapa of garlic prawns

Local cuisine and handicrafts

In addition to its own culinary personality, Seville has collected and combined many gastronomic influences from all over Andalusia, shaped by the different raw materials available in each of the provinces or areas and the varying ways in which they are used.

Seville, the capital of Andalusia, has also embraced many important cultures, including the Romans and later the Muslims and Jews. Although each of them has left their own mark, undeniably the greatest legacy –as in Andalusian cuisine in general– was bequeathed by the Muslims.

The popularity of fish in Seville is undoubtedly due to "its" River Guadalquivir. A very typical dish in Seville is marinated fish, prepared with crushed garlic, oregano, bay leaf, ground red pepper, salt, water and vinegar. Salted fish is also very popular. Sevillian restaurants also offer red sea bream, sea bass and other fish of similar size.

In the long tradition of fish in Seville, cod (*bacalao*) deserves a special mention. It is prepared in many ways and as part of innumerable dishes, such as cod with

Tapa (snack) of marinated fish





Typical Lent flavours

tomato sauce, "colorao" (coloured) cod, cod *pavía* (rolled in batter), etc.

The decision to plant rice in the Guadalquivir marshes made this cereal a popular feature of many dishes in this region. *Arroz caldoso* ("soupy" rice) for example is accompanied by river crabs, duck, pigeon, thrush or hare, while *gazpacho* and *salmorejo*, cold soups based on tomato and vegetables, are the leading dishes in the hot summers.

We must not forget the *tapas* (snacks) ritual in the city's bars and restaurants; *tapas* are made out of a whole range of products prepared in many different ways, such as *embutidos* (cold sausage meats), *flamenquines* (ham stuffed meat rolls), *pringá* (pork sausages, meat and lard) or chickpeas with spinach.

The most typical sweets include *torrijas* (fried bread with honey), made according to a Muslim recipe but enriched with wine, which are very popular during Holy Week, and *Yemas de San Leandro*, a sweet made with sugar and egg yolk in the Convent of San Leandro.

Torrijas, a typical Holy Week sweet





Above, April Fair.
Below, procession of the Rocío Brotherhood

The city's solid artisan tradition, handed down by its ancient guilds, offers a broad spectrum of the most varied products. Apart from the delicious confectionery made by cloistered nuns, there are all kinds of other products: Triana ceramics, with brightly painted tiles and other items, silver and gold pieces, embroidery, textiles, sculpture and other trades relating to the 'fiestas', cabinet-making, leather goods, wrought iron, glass, musical instruments and bookbinding.



Feasts

- **Holy Week**. A crucial date in the Sevillian calendar. Its processions and religious statues are the best known aspects of this highly regarded penitential celebration.
- The **April Fair** is the most important of its kind in Andalusia, held in an ephemeral tented city, featuring singing, dancing and lots of fun. There is also a famous bullfighting festival in the Maestranza bullring.
- The **May Crosses** is a popular festival noted for its decorated courtyards.
- The **Rocío**, a religious pilgrimage-festival takes place in June, as does **Corpus Christi**, with a grand procession through the city.

Carmona



1. *Alcázar de Abajo* (lower fortress) or *Puerta de Sevilla Alcázar*
2. *Alcázar* of King Pedro
3. Church of Santa María
4. Church of Santiago
5. Gate of Córdoba
6. Church of San Bartolomé
7. Church of San Felipe
8. Old Town Hall / Mudejar House
9. Church of San Blas
10. Convent of Discalced Carmelites
11. Convent of Santa Clara
12. City Museum
13. Church of San Pedro
14. Roman Necropolis
15. Town Hall
16. Food market

i Tourist Information

Tourist Office
Alcázar de la Puerta de Sevilla s/ n
Tel. 954 190 955

City Museum
C/ San Ildefonso, 1
Tel. 954 140 128

Carmona Archaeological Complex
Avda. de Jorge Bonsor, 9
Tel. 600 14 36 32



Picacho Tower

The strategic position of Carmona in the centre of one of the most fertile areas of Andalusia and excellently placed on the main routes through the Guadalquivir valley explains its important role over thousands of years of history.

In Roman times, *Carmo*, as it was then known, became an important town, endowed with walls, gates, buildings and public spaces.

The Muslims developed the town even further. During the Umayyad Caliphate, it was made the capital of an extensive *cora* or province. The family of the great writer and historian Ibn Khaldun came from Carmona.

With the decline of the Caliphate of Cordoba, Carmona became the capital of an independent state, which in

Ancient entrance to the town





Night View of *Puerta de Sevilla Alcázar*

the end was absorbed into the *taifa* kingdom of Seville. While still retaining its rebellious nature, Qarmuna became more important under the Almoravids and Almohads, who reinforced it considerably, turning it into one of the foremost cities of al-Andalus. Subject to frequent attacks by the Castilian forces from the beginning of the 13th century, it surrendered to King Ferdinand III in 1247.

In the Modern Age, Carmona like many of the county towns of Lower Andalusia, is a thriving administrative, agricultural, artisan and commercial centre, which is full of palatial houses and ecclesiastical buildings. Fortunately, the urban reforms of the 19th and 20th centuries safeguarded most of the valuable heritage accumulated over its long, rich history, so that today Carmona can pride itself on having one of the most beautiful and best preserved old towns in the whole region.

Street and tower of San Felipe





Ancient entrance to the town

Gate of Cordoba



Visits

The Alcazar of the Gate of Sevilla

The western entrance to the walled town is protected by an impressive bastion constructed with large stone ashlars, which doubled as a palace in the Middle Ages. It is probably one of the oldest fortifications in Andalusia as it was built on the site of an earlier fort dating from the 8th century BC, which was refurbished by the Carthaginians and extended by the Romans to its present layout, between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC. They also built a temple. The Arabs added more fortifications between the 9th and 12th centuries and it was later modified yet again by the Christians. The Gate comprises two sections; the first, with a horseshoe arch, is Islamic, and the second is of Roman origin. The fortress stands at its side, with the slim *Torre del Homenaje* (keep) at the front, a platform and the *Patio de los Aljibes* a courtyard with water tanks, over what was formerly the Roman temple, the Gold Tower and the *Salón de los Presos* (prisoners' hall), the Governor's residence and a prison for noblemen under Christian rule in the late Middle Ages.

The Upper Alcazar or Gate of Cordoba

The perimeter wall around the town of Carmona was built in the first millennium BC and underwent constant additions by Arabs and Christians until the end of the Middle Ages. Another of its strong points was in the high part of the town, on the edge of the Alcor. This mighty fortress, which protected the Marchena Gate, is basically a Moorish construction but underwent substantial reforms in the 14th century during the reign of King Pedro I, who used it as both palace and castle. The Cordoba Gate, flanked by two large fortified towers, stands to the north of the Upper *Alcazar*. Roman in origin, its neoclassical appearance is due to the work undertaken by José Echamorro in 1800.

The Priory Church of Santa Maria

Work on this church, which resembles Seville Cathedral, began in the early 15th century. It was built on top of the oratory of the Muslim mosque of *Qarmuna* and the base of the Islamic minaret and the courtyard where the Muslims performed their ablutions (Court of the Orange trees) still survive today. This courtyard has galleries with pointed arches and thick columns, one of which has a 6th-century Visigoth calendar engraved upon it, evidence of the superposition of different religions in this area.

The Gothic interior of the church houses many artistic treasures, such as the 16th-century main altarpiece by Juan Bautista Vazquez 'the Elder' and excellent paintings by Pedro de Campaña and Francisco de Zurbarán in the Chapel of San José.



Church of Santiago

Priory church of Santa María. Left, Court of the Orange Trees. Below, inside of the Church







City Museum. Room dedicated to the Roman period

The City Museum

Next to the Church of Santa Maria, Carmona Museum is situated in the stately home of the Marquis de Las Torres. Scale models and reconstructions showing the development of the town from Paleolithic times to the present day are on display in the residential and servants' quarters situated around the courtyards.



City Museum. Right, room dedicated to the Islamic era. Above, objects from the al-Andalus period



The Carmona of al-Andalus

Al-Himyari reports that Carmona "is settled on a mountainside and it is surrounded by a stone wall... It is generally impregnable from all sides, except on its western face. In *Qarmuna* there is a Great Mosque, with marble columns and stone pilasters. There is also a weekly market, on Thursdays. There are public baths and an arsenal... Inside *Qarmuna* there are plenty of ancient ruins and a stone quarry..."



Oil lamps from al-Andalus period (10th-11th centuries). Municipal Museum

Walls of Carmona





Church of San Pedro

Interior of the Convent of Santa Clara



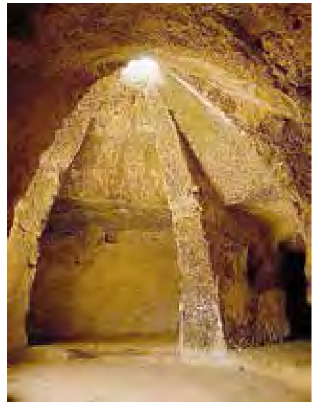
The Church of San Pedro

Among the innumerable interesting buildings that Carmona has on offer, the Church of San Pedro is definitely worth a visit. It is situated outside the walls, opposite the Gate of Sevilla. Although it was started in the 15th century, its main section dates from the 18th century, which explains its Baroque air. The bell tower, which is a small-scale version of the Giralda tower in Seville, soon catches the visitor's eye.

Also noticeable is its fine brick and tile work, and the splendid sacramental chapel is a model of 18th-century architecture.

Surrounding area

Some of the most important Roman remains in the Peninsula are to be found to the west of the town centre, in an exceptional necropolis with more than two hundred tombs, dating between 50 BC and 360 AD. Discovered by accident in 1869, it occupies a huge area near the remains of an amphitheatre and a section of the Via Augusta. Excavations have revealed a fabulous collection of remains, consisting of three main roads that link simple underground burial chambers with niches to complex mausoleums. In this fascinating world beyond the grave, the tomb of Servilia is particularly important, covering an area of some 1,300 square metres, with columned gateways and various rooms decorated with pilasters, mouldings and wall paintings. The Elephant's tomb is also attractive because of its rich symbolism. It is a small sanctuary similar to those in Phrygia, where festivities in honour of the rising sun and the start of spring took place along with other initiation rites. The sculpture of the Elephant, a symbol of Light, can still be seen in this tomb. A look around the Necropolis Museum, where a large number of pieces from this site are on display, rounds off this pleasant visit.



Inside the Tomb of Servilia. Carmona Archaeological Complex

Roman bridge and road





Roman necropolis



View of Carmona in the mid-19th century

Romantic Carmona

The enormous impression that this town, on the road between Seville and Cordoba, left on travellers and artists in the Romantic period, was evident from the attention and praise it received in their writings, sketches and engravings. Richard Ford refers to it in the following terms: "Carmona, the Moorish *Karmunah*, with its easterly walls, its castle and its situation, is very picturesque... look at the ramparts and the Moorish gate to the city, in the form of an arch... and the magnificent view over the vast plains below".





Left, typical convent-made sweets.
Above, embroidery handicrafts

Local cuisine and handicrafts

Carmona has preserved its gastronomic culture with its own particular style of cooking varied high quality dishes, heir to the al-Andalus and Mudejar traditions of the ancient city.

Vegetables grown locally are the raw materials for this traditional and popular cuisine. To list all the dishes would be an endless task: *alboronías* (aubergine stew), spinach, salad dressings, escarole lettuce with ground red pepper, tomato soup, asparagus shoots, "yellow" potatoes with codfish, *gazpacho* (tomato cold soup), *migas* (toasted bread crumbs), *gachas* (wheat flour porridge), green asparagus with scrambled eggs, cardoons tagarninas stew, white beans stew, pig's trotters, and a crusty "tostá" (toast) with *manteca colorá* (red lard) and small pieces of meat.

A strong Arab influence can be seen in local desserts and the town's convents have a long tradition of cake-making. Typical desserts include the *torta inglesa* (spongy puff pastry), bread rolls with olive oil, rice pudding, *torrijas* coated in sweet wine and honey, homemade *polvorones* (crumbly shortbreads), almond cakes and a tasty stew made with chestnuts and cinnamon.

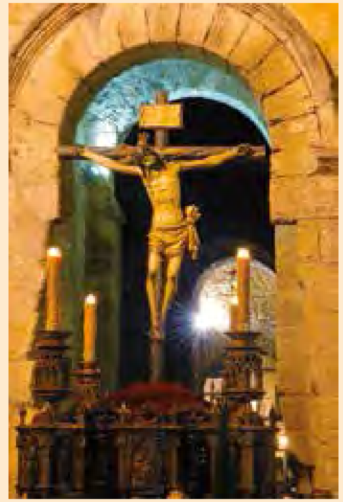
The long historical and cultural assimilation of the contributions made to the town by Romans, Muslims, Christian Spain and even the Italian Renaissance has produced a varied array of handicrafts closely linked



Anisette factory

to religious celebrations, and in particular Holy Week, such as gilded embroideries.

In Carmona, many crafts have arisen in response to the needs of local farmers, as well as those that made Andalusian houses so distinctive such as glazed tiling, pottery, the intricate ironwork on window-grilles and gates, cabinetmaking or the manufacture of horse-drawn carriages. This curiously Carmonesque combination of religious crafts, home decoration, and the manufacture of tools and domestic objects, still survives today.





Above, Holy Week procession. Right, Carnival celebrations.

Feasts

- **Carnival** (February), a deep-rooted tradition in the *Campiña* (plains) region. Declared a Fiesta of special Interest for Tourists in Andalusia.
- **Semana Santa** (Holy Week), with its magnificent processions within the old city walls.
- Third week of May, the **Carmona Fair**. Celebrations are held in marquees, in some of which (El Casino, La Giraldilla or Municipal) visitors can enjoy the hospitality of the people of Carmona.
- **Corpus Christi.**
- First Sunday of September, **Pilgrimage of Virgen de Gracia** followed by fiestas in her honour.
- Third week of September, the **pilgrimage of San Mateo.**
- January 5, the Three **Wise Men parade**, organized by "La Giraldilla" club, processes around the town bringing happiness and excitement to all the children of Carmona.

Écija



1. Church of Santa María / Museum
2. Convent of Las Teresas
3. Church of San Francisco
4. Church of Santa Bárbara
5. Palace of Peñaflor
6. Palace of Valdehermoso
7. Church of San Gil
8. Church of Santa Ana
9. Church of San Juan
10. Main Church of Santa Cruz-Museum of Sacred Art
11. Convent of *Las Marroquíes* (Moroccan)
12. Church of La Concepción "El Hospitalito"(little hospital)
13. Palace of Benamejí – Municipal Historical Museum
14. Church of Santiago
15. Town Hall
16. Royal Abattoirs
17. Food Market
18. Almohad Tower of *Puerta Palma*

ⓘ Tourist Information

Tourist Office
C/ Elvira, 1-A
Tel. 955 902 933

Information Office at the Municipal Museum
Plaza de la Constitución, 1
Tel. 954 830 431



Tower of San Gil

Walls built in the Caliphate era

Écija, with its white houses bristling with towers, nestles in a valley on the banks of the River Genil. The town has remote origins. The oldest archaeological remains from *Astigi Vetus* date back to the Bronze Age and the Tartessos era. Later, it was one of the three main towns of Roman Baetica. Under Muslim rule, Écija flourished, becoming the capital of a *cora* or province.

Known as *Istiyya* in the times of al-Andalus, the city still retains a few remains from the Umayyad era. In the Church of Santa Cruz for example, thought to have been the site of the mosque, there are two inscriptions commemorating the construction of ablution fountains, one dated 930 AD and the other 977. There are also some remains of the city walls, dating back to the Caliphate period.





Ancient fortified enclosure and typical street

During the 12th and 13th centuries, under the Almoravids and Almohads, the city was revitalized, and new walls, mosques and souks were constructed.

The town surrendered to King Ferdinand III in 1240 during his unstoppable advance across the Guadalquivir valley towards Seville.

Until the end of the Middle Ages, Écija combined its role as a farming and crafts centre with active participation in the wars against Granada, the last bastion of Muslim power.



View of Écija in the mid-16th century. *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*



View of the town of Écija

From the 16th century onwards it benefited from the general prosperity of Lower Andalusia, as can be seen in its churches, convents and palaces, where, amongst other illustrious figures, the writer Luis Velez de Guevara was born.

During the al-Andalus era, Écija produced leading figures in the world of culture, such as Muhab b. Idris, an outstanding legal scholar and mathematician, or the historian al-Tahan, a disciple of Qasim b. Asbag, who wrote *The book of the men of Écija*, a collection of biographies of important local characters.



Panoramic view of Écija and its bell-towers

Visits

The walled town

On a smaller site than that used in Roman times, the Arabs and particularly the Almohads in the 12th century redeveloped the town with a governor's residence and a fortified area, fragments of which still exist between the houses.

The octagonal tower in Plazuela Quintana is the most important of about thirty towers of which there are still some remains.





Left, *Albarrana* (defensive tower) in Plazuela Quintana. Above, a street in Écija



View of Écija in an ancient engraving by A. Albizzi (1612)

Écija according to al-Idrisi

The geographer al-Idrisi described the city as it was in the times of al-Andalus: "Écija is a town built on the banks of the river of Granada, called Genil. This is a pretty town; it has a remarkable bridge built of hewn stone, busy bazaars where all manner of things are sold, gardens and orchards, where the vegetation is abundant and it is surrounded by green fields..."



Parish Church of Santa Cruz

The Parish Church of Santa Cruz

This unfinished church bears the marks of the main events in local history. It seems likely that an early Christian cathedral stood on this site, where the Muslims later installed the Great Mosque, of which survive the arcaded courtyard and two inscriptions in Arabic dating from the 10th century, inlaid in the tower. The work of medieval Christian craftsmen is manifest in the elaborate Mudejar façade with plasterwork in the courtyard and the influence of the Renaissance in the belfry, often associated with the Giralda in Seville. The church was destroyed in the 1755 earthquake and reconstructed between 1776 and 1836, in Neo-classical style, without ever being completed. Inside, we find the important chapel of Nuestra Señora del Valle, an early Christian tomb, dating from the end of the 5th century, with reliefs of the Good Shepherd, the Altar, a magnificent silver monstrance, gold and silver pieces, altarpieces, paintings and sculptures.

Plaza de España, or el Salón

This is the hub of local life. There is a fountain in the centre overlooked by the Town Hall, a historic building with a collection of admirable Roman mosaics in the chapter house. The church and convent of San Francisco stand on the same side of the square and various houses with shops below are a good example of popular Castilian architecture. The *miradores* (viewpoints) are also of interest. These were high buildings with galleries and tiered windowed balconies from which one could watch the different events held in the square.





Above, Plaza de España. Left, typical Écija house



Church of Santiago



House-Palace of the Palma family



Above, façade of the Peñaflor Palace. Right, towers of Écija

The Peñaflor Palace

The marvellous collection of mansions in Écija has some early examples, like the Valdehermoso Palace, with its classical 16^{th}-century Renaissance portal. However, most of them belong to the 18^{th} century Baroque period, like the Palace of the Marquises of Peñaflor, the most emblematic and colourful in the city, with its extensive façade following the curve of the street and its continuous wrought-iron balcony and highly colourful painted walls.







Palace of Benamejí. Archaeological Museum

The Benamejí Palace, Local History Museum

This splendid palace dating from the early 18th century with two lookout towers and a stone-carved portal, houses the local museum, which has interesting archaeological remains –mosaics, ceramics and other pieces– and explanatory panels about the history of the town, in four rooms. The fifth room is dedicated to horses. The building itself is spectacular, with a galleried patio, a splendid stairwell, horse block and stables.



Palace of Benamejí

Horse-drawn tours around the town (right) and the surrounding countryside (bottom of page). Below, M. Cárdenas horse stud.





Surrounding area

Places like the Monclova Castle and the fertile countryside around the town make it an attractive spot for excursions –particularly on horseback– into the fields dotted with white farmhouses and old mills.





Salmorejo, typical dish from Écija

Local cuisine and handicrafts

The rich gastronomy of Écija is the result of its long history. The ingredients produced in its fertile fields are used in dishes like *gazpacho* (cold tomato soup), *salmorejo* (cold tomato and bread cream), *espinacas labradas* (spinach with fried bread, garlic and olive oil) or *Sopa de Gato* –cat soup– (a tasty soup of ancient origin made of dry bread, garlic, oil and salt). Other typical dishes include oxtail, asparagus casserole or *flamenquines* (ham stuffed meat rolls).

There is also delicious confectionery, the most famous example being *yemas ecijanas* (yolks from Écija). Each convent has its own speciality: jams from the Convent of Las Teresas, Moroccan biscuits from the Convent of la Concepción, fairy cakes and cinnamon biscuits from Santa Florentina, and small cakes and *roscos* (dough rings) from Santa Inés.

One of the greatest treasures of Écija is handicrafts.

Horseman dressed in the traditional way





Above, Statue of Christ on the Cross during the Holy Week of Écija. Right, flamenco singing

Écija had numerous guilds in the 18^{th} century with highly regarded artisans whose reputation spread throughout the countryside around Seville. Many of these works have become an integral part of the artistic heritage of the city. There are still highly qualified, prestigious craftsmen who produce artistic pieces of the finest quality. The most prized handicrafts nowadays, due to their perfect technique and finishing, are leather crafts, ceramics, embossing, wrought iron and gold embroidery.



Feasts

- February, **Carnival**.
- ***Semana Santa*** (Holy Week), with some of the most remarkable, most strongly-rooted religious processions in the province of Seville. The brotherhoods process through the town carrying large floats with very valuable sacred images.
- April 25, the **Isla Redonda pilgrimage**.
- September 8, **Feast of the Virgen del Valle**, patron saint of Écija.
- Second week of September, **San Mateo Fair**. The horse plays an important role in this fair with thoroughbred horse shows and displays of horses and carriages.
- September, ***Romería* (pilgrimage) *del Villar***.

Cordoba



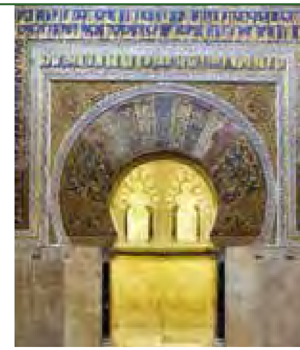
1. Church of San Hipólito
2. Church of San Nicolás
3. Almodóvar Gate
4. Bullfighting Museum
5. Synagogue
6. Mosque-Cathedral
7. Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos (Christian Kings' Fortress)
8. La Albolafia mills and waterwheel
9. El Potro Square
10. Arab Baths
11. Archaeological Museum
12. Church of San Francisco
13. Museum of Fine Arts
14. Church of Santiago
15. La Corredera Square
16. Villalones Palace
17. Viana Palace
18. Convent of Santa Isabel
19. Diputación Provincial (Provincial Council)
20. La Malmuerta Tower
21. Church of San Cayetano
22. Church of San Lorenzo
23. La Calahorra Tower-Museum
24. Visitors Reception Centre
25. Julio Romero de Torres Museum
26. Roman Mausoleums
27. City Hall

i Tourist Information

Tourist Information
Tourist Information Office
C/ Torrijos, 10
Tel.: 957 355 179

Cordoba Archaeological Museum
Plaza de Jerónimo Páez, 7
Tel.: 957 35 55 17

Madinat al-Zahra Archaeological Complex
Ctra. de Palma del Río, km. 5,5
Tel. 957 104 933



Mihrab of the Mosque of Córdoba commissioned by Al-Hakam II

Bridge over the River Guadalquivir with La Calahorra Tower and the Mosque in the background

On the banks of the River Guadalquivir, throughout history Córdoba has been a centre of learning and knowledge. It was already important in Roman times as the capital of *Hispania Ulterior* and the birthplace of the philosopher Seneca. It later became the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate, where the people of three different cultural traditions lived peacefully together and contributed to the recovery of the classical culture of Ancient Greece through scholars such as Averroes and Maimonides. Under Abd al-Rahman III, Córdoba became a centre of civilization, a bridge between East and West.

Its Great Mosque, the finest mosque in the Muslim West, is the most glorious expression of the art and culture of al-Andalus.



Just a few kilometres outside Córdoba, we come to the archaeological site of the palace city of Madinat al-Zahra. Built to celebrate the power of the Caliphate, its architecture and decoration contain the seeds of what would later become the Muslim art of al-Andalus and the Muslim West. Al-Zahra was a source of inspiration to other kingdoms.

Visits

The Great Mosque

One of the greatest works of art of all times, a World Heritage Site, a prodigy of equilibrium and harmony in space that sums up the wonderful architecture of the Caliphate.

Erected on top of an old Visigoth basilica, the original mosque was built in just a year (786). The Emirs and Caliphs added to it in the following centuries. Abd al-Rahman III built a new minaret and widened the courtyard; al-Hakam II made it deeper as far as the river allowed, and engaged artists from Damascus and Byzantium to adorn the dazzling *mihrab*. The most spectacular extension work was undertaken by al-Mansur, on the eastern side.

All in all, the Mosque has 19 aisles, perpendicular to the *qibla* wall where the *mihrab* is situated, with marble and mosaic adornments in Byzantine style. Outside the covered section there is a courtyard or *sahn*. Marble pillars support two levels of arches, the first are horseshoe arches and the second are stilted semicircular arches, where ochre stone voussoirs alternate with red brick. All of this is covered by a flat wooden ceiling under a roof with two slopes. The most sumptuous and dazzling feature is, without doubt, al-Hakam's *mihrab*, preceded by the *maqsura*, an area reserved for the caliph.



Multi-lobed arches in the Mosque, with the *mihrab* in the background



Interior of the Mosque of Córdoba



Dome covering the *maqsura*, in the Mosque of Córdoba



Villaviciosa chapel in an engraving by Lewis, year 1835

The Court of the Orange Trees lies to the north, with galleries on three sides formed by triple semicircular arches; the side that leads on to the *haram* is shaped by horseshoe arches, between which the Gate of the Palms stands, later refurbished during the Renaissance.

Outside, the building shows medium-height walls articulated by regular-section buttresses. The entrances to the Mosque are openings in these walls, mostly remodelled later in history and some of them substantially restored. The main entrance is the *Puerta del Perdon* (Gate of Forgiveness), on the north façade, that harmonizes various styles. One of the oldest entrances, the Gate of San Esteban, is in the western wall and dates from the time of Abd al-Rahman I.

The Christian Kings built the Great Chapel and the Royal Chapel in the central part of the naves. Work on the Cathedral began in 1523. It was built right in the middle of the forest of pillars at the request of the



Gate of San Ildefonso in the Mosque of Córdoba

Interior of the Mosque of Córdoba





“Forest” of columns

Interior of the Mosque of Cordoba in an engraving by Lewis, 1835



A forest of columns

The fame of the Mosque of Cordoba spread rapidly after its construction. In the 12th century, al-Idrisi asserted: “There is no equal among all [mosques]”. In the 14th century, al-Himyari stated: “the famous Mosque, well-known in the whole universe, is one of the most beautiful monuments in the world”. Its vast prayer hall was certainly its most admired space. Centuries later, the “Romantic” writer Theophile Gautier (1811-1872) coined the metaphor a “forest of columns” to describe the prayer hall of the mosque. Since then this image of a roofed forest of “marble vegetation that had spontaneously sprouted out of the ground” inevitably comes to mind.

Chapter, with the support of the Emperor Charles V. Work was begun by Hernán Ruiz the Elder and continued by his son Hernán Ruiz the Younger in 1545. The Cathedral is shaped like a Latin Cross, with side chapels, a ribbed vault in the Great Chapel, half-barrel vaults in the choir and an elliptical vault in the transept.



Left, Almodóvar Gate. Below, Caliphate era baths in the Alcázar



The *Judería* quarter

The *Judería* or Jewish quarter starts in the north-eastern corner of the Great Mosque, with a labyrinth of narrow white streets up against the walls. Among the many small tourist shops there are some fine interesting buildings, such as the Synagogue, the only one remaining in this area. It was discovered at the end of the 19th century and has undergone several restorations. It is located in Los Judíos street and



Synagogue of Córdoba



Oil lamp dating from the 10th century. Archaeological Museum of Córdoba

dates from 1315. It was converted into a church in the 16th century and belonged to the Shoemakers Guild. Rectangular in shape, all its walls were covered with decoration, but only the higher frescoes are still extant. There is an inscription about Yishaq Moheb, the founder of the Synagogue.

The *Puerta de Almodovar* (Almodovar Gate or Gate of the Jews) nearby, is the only surviving example of the great medieval city gates from the 14th century. It was put up over a previous 10th century gate, when it was known as *Puerta del Nogal* (Gate of the Walnut Tree).

Córdoba hosts countless constructions from all periods in history: like the bridge over the Guadalquivir River or the Temple of Claudio Marcelo, from the Roman era, the Calahorra Tower, the Albolafia water wheel or the baths of Santa Maria from al-Andalus, as well as later buildings constructed under Christian rule, such as the Alcázar (fortress) of the Christian Kings, the churches of San Nicolas de la Villa or San Juan de los Caballeros that still retains a beautiful minaret dating from the Umayyad period, Santa Marina, San Miguel, San Pablo, San Andrés, the Hospital of Jesus Crucificado, San Roque, San Pedro de Alcantara, the Palace of the Marquises of Viana or the Palace of the Paez de Castillejo family, now a splendid Archaeological Museum.



Above, La Albolafia water mill. On the right, ancient engraving by David Roberts, 19th century





Surrounding area

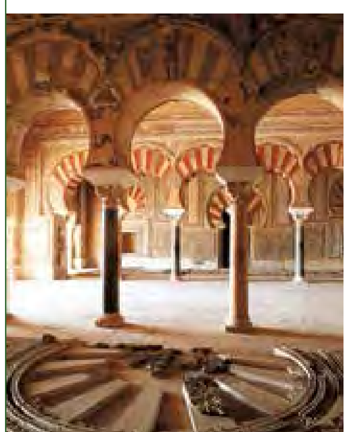
Madinat al-Zahra

The archaeological site of Madinat al-Zahra was abandoned for centuries to the point of being used as a quarry for building materials until 1910, when the first digs turned it into an archaeological site of huge importance. Nowadays it houses a fascinating museum.

The structure of the Umayyad city is easily distinguishable. Found in the foothills of the mountains, in *Chabal al-Arus* (Hill of the Bride), it covered just over 100 hectares, on three levels from north to south.

The visit starts at the Northern wall and Gate, from where a covered passage leads up to the higher level, where the fortress stands. To the right stand the Caliph's private quarters, including his bedchambers and courtyards, situated above the barracks of the Royal Guard, the house by the pond and the "home of Yafar", a freed









Top, decorative detail. Above and right, general views of the Madinat al-Zahra archaeological complex

On the previous page, from top to bottom, basilica building, entrance gate to Yáfar's house and interior of the Salón Rico Reception Hall

slave who later became al-Hakam's prime minister. This part houses the best preserved remains.

On the left, there is a set of rooms which are thought to be part of the House of the Ministers, the public part of the palace, consisting of a reception hall, a square gardened courtyard where native species are grown and an area once used for stables. From the courtyard, a sloping path leads to the Eastern gate, the monumental entrance to the public area of the Alcázar, where military parades and official celebrations were once held.

The middle terrace occupies the main section of the palace, with the large reception hall and gardens. The Hall of Abd al-Rahman III, or *Salón Rico* (Rich Hall), was built between the years 952 and 957 and is shaped as a central portico with five horseshoe arches. The three central naves are separated by two rows of seven columns each. The interior walls of the Hall are awash with well-preserved decorative details.

The *Jardín Alto* (Higher Garden) is laid out in front of this section of the Palace, enclosed by powerful walls that separate it from the medina, the area intended for the common people, also known as the *Jardín Bajo* (Lower Garden).







The Golden Age

During the period of al-Andalus, culture flourished in Córdoba as never before. It acted as a bridge between East and West bringing back to Europe much of the lost wisdom of Ancient Greece. Famous philosophers included the Neo-Platonic Ibn Masarra (885-931), author of the *Book on discerning explanation*; the versatile writer Ibn Hazm (994-1063), author of works like *Risala, Critical History of Religions* and the treatise on love *The Ring of the Dove*, which would influence the Arcipreste de Hita in his *Book of Good Love*, and above all, Muhammad Ibn Rush, called Averroes (1126-1198), author of treatises on medicine, mathematics, astronomy, ethics and philosophy such as *The Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, and *Comments to Aristotle's Works*, highly influential in Christian Europe.

Equally important was his contemporary, Maimonides (1135-1204), a Jew who excelled in medicine and science. His beautifully titled *Guide for the Perplexed* is a kind of *summa theologica* for Judaism. The constellation of figures is extensive. Among others it includes the poet, Ibn Dhayd (992-1035), whose work would influence Dante's *Divine Comedy*; Abu Bakr Ibn Quzman, the inventor of *zajal* poems, or Ibn Hammud al-Qabri, creator of a new poetry meter form called *muwassaha*.

Above, statue of Maimónides, in Córdoba. Left, Caliphate era dinar minted in Córdoba during the reign of Hisham II, year 990



Statue of Averroes, in Córdoba



The Mosque of Cordoba in an engraving by Laborde, 1812

Cordoba, the capital of al-Andalus

Cordoba's status as the capital city of al-Andalus and as an administrative, economic, religious and cultural centre, transformed it from the capital of a Roman province to one of the main cities of the medieval world. The city, located in the midst of the Guadalquivir river valley at the last point upstream where the River is navigable, started taking shape in ancient times, gradually developing into an important economic centre.



Above, inner courtyard of the Arabic Baths of Santa María. Right, satellite image showing the floor-plan of the Mosque-Cathedral



Local cuisine and handicrafts

Cordovan cuisine compiles the traditions of the different cultures that came to settle in the city. Many of the recipes have been saved from old Muslim and Jewish manuscripts. Some of the most popular dishes are *salmorejo* (a creamy *gazpacho*), artichokes prepared in the style of Montilla, oxtail or *flamenquines* (ham-stuffed meat rolls). Confectionery includes –among many others– *pastel cordobés* (Cordovan pie) and *suspiros de Almanzor* (Almanzor's sighs).

Cordoba and its province have one of the richest craft traditions in Spain. The crafts it inherited from al-Andalus encompassed a large number of trades. It is best known for its jewellers, an ancient traditional craft, its leather craftsmen who worked with *cordobanes* (cordovans), high quality goat hides already famous in the Middle Ages, its potters, who were inspired by the creations of al-Andalus, and other masters of their crafts.

Thus, leather is the raw material for the cordovans and *guadamecíes* –embossed, modelled and painted pieces of leather with both classical and modern designs. The visitor will also be impressed by the Cordovan filigree, gold or silver thread welded onto a metal structure, to create a figure. Many jewellery shops display exclusive, classical and modern designs in their windows; Cordoba is one of the main jewellery production centres.





Left, *salmorejo cordobés*, typical dish. Above, typical tavern



Above, festivity of *Cruces* (Crosses). Below, a *patio* in Cordoba







Below, 10th-century silver perfume bottle, Archaeological Museum of Cordoba. Right, goat-hide leather craftsman

Feasts

- **Holy Week**, one of the best-known in Andalusia.
- **May Crosses**, First week in May. A large number of crosses made of flowers are put up in streets, squares and courtyards.
- Second week in May, **Fiesta de los Patios (Courtyards)**, declared Intangible World Cultural Heritage. Residents of the city's historic neighbourhoods decorate their courtyards offering a unique opportunity to admire the beautiful corners of Cordoba at their best.
- May 25, the **Fair of Nuestra Señora de La Salud**, Cordoba's main fair.
- September 29, **Festivities in honour of Archangel Raphael**, the city's patron saint.

Zuheros



1. Castle
2. Wall sections
3. Parish Church of *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*
4. Archaeological Museum
5. *La Villa* viewpoint
6. *Las Escominillas* viewpoint
7. *El Bailón* viewpoint
8. *Cueva de los Murciélagos* (Bats cave)
9. Town Hall
10. Library
11. Mudejar district
12. "Juan Fernández Cruz" Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions

ⓘ Tourist Information

Tourist Office
Plaza de la Paz, 1
Tel. 957 694 545

Archaeological Museum and Castle
Tel. 957 694 545

"Juan Fernández Cruz" Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions
Tel. 957 694 617

Cueva de los Murciélagos Eco-museum
Tel. 697 956 384



Views of Zuheros

Zuheros is one of the most picturesque villages in Andalusia, hanging from a wild-looking rock on the edge of the natural park formed by the neighbouring *sierras*.

A brief look at the local museum makes the visitor realize that this spot was settled in the very distant past. *Los Murciélagos* cave was already inhabited in the Paleolithic age and there are plentiful Iberian and Roman remains. Towards the end of the 9th century, the Muslims founded a rock-top village/watchtower on one of these sites, probably the Roman *Sucubos*, and called it *Suhayra*, the diminutive of *sakhr*, meaning rock. Its defences were strengthened under the Caliphate and later under Almohad rule. It eventually fell to King Ferdinand III, who was obliged to take it by storm. A sign of the importance of the town at the time is that the King granted Zuheros to his wife, Jeanne de Ponthieu.





Left, Zuheros Castle. Below, square leading to the Castle



Like the other villages on this *Moorish strip* along the border with the Kingdom of Granada, it became a typical fortress town, marked by its al-Andalus past. In the 15th century, it became part of the feudal domain of the Aguilar family who later passed it on to the Fernández de Cordoba. They added a touch of grandeur to Zuheros by building an impressive palace next to the castle, in the style of the great nobles of the Renaissance.

Visits

Castle and Palace

A typical rock fortress, the castle is in a spectacular position on top of an enormous rock. What remains of it is dominated by a high square tower, reinforced by bastions on the rocky outcrops. Linked by some with the Castle of *al-Benzarade* or "of the good air", it was begun in the 9th century and later rebuilt by the Zirids in the 11th and again in the 12th century. The Christians also added to it after the conquest. In front of the military area with the tower and courtyard, the Lords of Zuheros built a Renaissance palace in the 16th century, of which some large ashlar stones and other details of masonry can still be seen.



A view of the Castle and Palace of Zuheros

Archaeological Museum

Objects related to Los Murciélagos cave and other archaeological sites nearby are on display here, including among others, stone instruments, pottery, coins, a Roman sculpture and a medieval sarcophagus.





Above, toga-dressed Roman sculpture. Right, Archaeological Museum



Church of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios

Church of Los Remedios

Probably built over a mosque, it was designed in the 16th century and greatly altered at the end of the 17th. The tower is perched on top of the old minaret and there are interesting artistic objects inside.

Cueva de los Murciélagos (Bats cave)



Cueva de los Murciélagos (Bats Cave)

The cave is on the top of a mountain behind the village at the end of a steep 4-km climb to an altitude of almost 1,000 meters. It has an extraordinary collection of limestone formations, shaped by the stream which runs through various sections.

Discovered in the 19th century, it once served as the home for the people of these mountains in the 5th and 4th millenniums BC. They left behind domestic tools, decorative objects and an excellent set of primitive cave paintings depicting goats and a burial scene. It was later used for storing fruit.



Re-creation of an ancient apothecary. Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions

"Juan Fernández Cruz" Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions

Located in the *Casa Grande* (big house), a building dating from the early 20th century, in its 28 exhibition rooms this Museum displays exceptional examples of the finest local craftsmanship, such as farming equipment, tools used in traditional jobs (shoemakers, saddlers, esparto craftsmen, carpenters, bakers, butchers…) and household objects. This unique collection contains more than 3,000 objects that illustrate the *savoir-faire* of Zuheros' craftsmen over the centuries.



Oil mill in the "Juan Fernández Cruz" Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions

Surrounding area

The neat whitewashed village of Zuheros invites you to wander through its labyrinth of steep streets, paths and little squares. It is crossed by a handful of broken streets that lead up to the balcony of the castle and the viewpoints of *La Villa, Las Escominillas* and *El Bailón*, with fantastic views over the gorge and the countryside.

The surrounding areas are of great ecological interest and are part of the Sierras Subbéticas Natural Park, an excellent choice for all kinds of excursions. A climb to the *Cueva de los Murciélagos* is a must. The panoramic views from the road, from the natural viewpoint of *La Atalaya* and from the platform just before the cave are astonishing: the village looks like an eagle's nest perched on the first hills of the *sierra* stretching out into the endless valley of the River Guadalquivir, lit up by the sudden flashes of its large white towns.

An interesting route for hikers takes us through the mountains from Zuheros to the country chapel of *Nuestra Señora de La Sierra*, near the town of Cabra.





Below, a panoramic view of Zuheros with Baena in the background. Above, a typical street



Zuheros seen from the gorge



Bailón stream



Left, a vegetable salad. Below, *clavellina*, a typical dish



Local cuisine and handicrafts

Cooking has a prominent role in Zuheros, with dishes such as *cachorreñas*, made with cod, eggs, bread, tomato and orange, and *migas* (toasted bread crumbs). The excellent handmade goat's cheese is a mark of the distinction and excellence of local cuisine. The "Villa de Zuheros Cheese Fest" in September is an excellent opportunity for tasting both local cheese and products made in nearby regions.

Other tasty dishes include *mojete*, lamb chops in batter, omelette in sauce, and rabbit in garlic sauce. However, the quintessential product of Zuheros cuisine is extra virgin olive oil (Baena Designation of Origin).

The typical sweets of the town include *flores* (flowers), *pestiños*, *roscos melados* (honey bread rolls), *pan de higo* (fig bread), and *requesón* (cottage cheese) with sugar and milk.



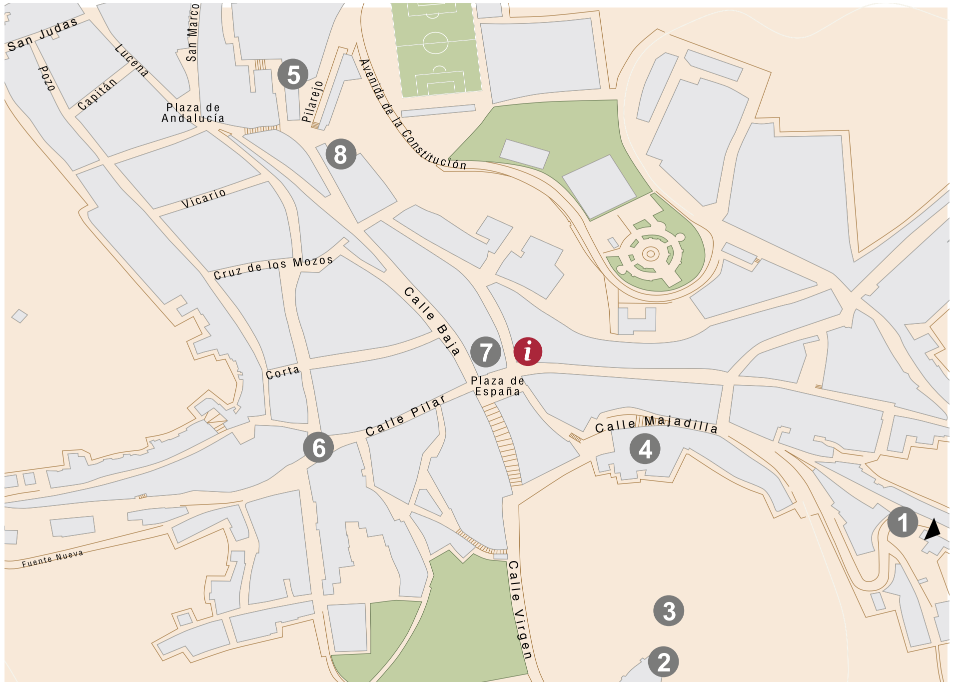
Above, procession of Jesús Nazareno. Right, Carnival



Feasts

- February, the **Carnival** with the *Corros del Melenchón*, groups who parade the streets, singing and dancing.
- **Holy Week** and Easter.
- August 15, the fair of ***Nuestra Señora de Los Remedios***.
- September 14, **fiesta of *Jesús Nazareno***.
- December 24 people go to **Midnight Mass** singing carols and playing *carrizos*, instruments made with sheepskin stretched over jars.

Carcabuey



1. Stone Bridge
2. Castle
3. *Aljibe* (cistern)
4. La Asunción Church
5. History Museum
6. El Pilar Fountain
7. Town Hall
8. Food market

(i) Tourist Information

Tourist Office
C/ Postigos s/n
Tel. 957 704 140

History Museum
C/ Pilarejo
Tel. 957 704 155



El Cañuelo Fountain

Carcabuey is right in the heart of the Sierras Subbeticas. It is the highest town in the region and has the largest protected natural area in the province of Cordoba. Apart from being a privileged natural area in the centre of Andalusia, it also has a diverse cultural heritage inherited from the different peoples that settled there over the centuries.

This area has been inhabited since prehistoric times, although the town itself was founded in the Roman era. Many fascinating remains from this period have been found in the town, such as altar stones, pedestals and a huge cistern that once belonged to the people of *Ipolcobulcula*, the Roman name for Carcabuey.

Some centuries later, under Muslim rule it was renamed *Karkabul*. From the 13th century onwards it was on the frontier between Muslim and Christian Spain and changed hands successively until it was taken once and for all by Martín Fernández de Portocarrero in 1341.

View of the castle and the town of Carcabuey



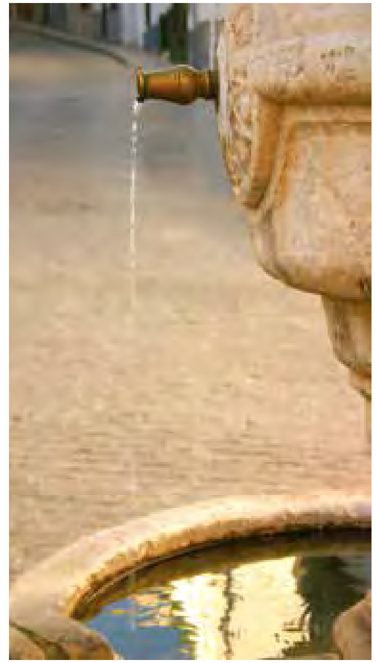


Typical geranium flowerpots

However, a further four centuries were to pass before the Subbetica region offered the world one of its greatest treasures: Cordoba Baroque, a product of its booming economy. In this way Carcabuey became an important town and although today the local economy is still based on farming, in recent years tourism has become increasingly important.

Panoramic view







Above, *El Pilar* Fountain. Right, Street leading to the Castle

Visits

Puente de Piedra (Stone Bridge)

Built over the River Palancar in the Caliphate period (10-11th centuries), the bridge is part of a road network in use since Medieval times. It consists of a single, semi-circular arch with a span of 7.40 meters. The entire monument was built in stone and its deck is not completely horizontal. In 2006 it was declared a Monument of Cultural Interest.

El Cañuelo Fountain





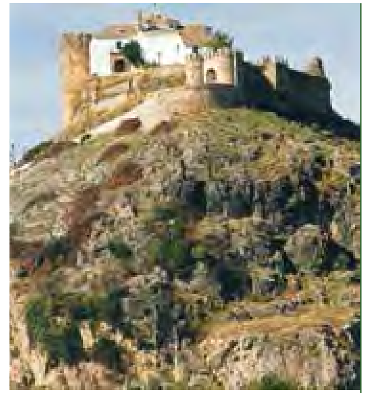
The Castle

A monument of huge archaeological interest, it sits on top of a rocky slope called *Cerro del Castillo* (Castle Hill) that overlooks the town. Many objects from human settlements from successive ancient periods have been discovered in the area. These include a sword dating from the Late Bronze Age (1200 BC) and a “Cruz del Negro” style urn (800 BC) on display at the British Museum and the Priego History Museum respectively.

There are many references to the Castle of *Karkabul* in ancient chronicles from the 9th century onwards; however, the remains that survive today date back to the 13th and 14th centuries. The castle precinct is a twelve-sided polygon built in this way to fit the available space; the fortress has five towers, two square and three circular. Inside the precinct, there is a square half-demolished structure that might once have been the keep and a simple country chapel from the 18th century.

Above, panoramic view of the Castle. Below, entrance to the castle





Carcabuey Castle

Right, Church of La Asunción. Below, Church of San Marcos



Aljibe (cistern)

Originally, there were two cisterns in the castle; one inside, of which only fragments of the walls survive, and one outside that remains watertight to this day. Some historians claim it dates from the Roman period, while others believe it is medieval, as it seems more characteristic of the Almohad era because of the large bricks used. It may even have been built after the Christian Conquest in 1341.

Church of La Asunción

The most important religious building in the town (declared a Monument of Cultural Interest) dates originally from the 14th century, although parts were added in the 16th and 17th centuries. Built in stone, masonry and brick, its floor-plan is shaped like a Latin cross. The transept is covered by a semi-spherical dome on lunettes. The decoration is austere and inside there are a number of valuable and beautiful works of art, such as the sculptures of Cristo de las Ánimas and Cristo de San Marcos by Alonso de Mena.





General panoramic view

Municipal History Museum

The Museum is in the old *Pilarejo* School building and covers a vast chronological span from the first known human settlement until the present day.

There are several archaeological sites in and around Carcabuey, dating from the Middle Paleolithic, through all the Prehistoric and Ancient History periods. Interesting discoveries from the Roman and Medieval Periods have also been made.



Interior of the Chapel of Santa Ana



View of the town



Lemon tree and typical chimney

Surrounding area

The area around Carcabuey is full of attractions due to its wonderful geographical location. The medieval Castle is like a balcony over the Natural Park, offering the visitor magnificent views of the mountain ranges and the foothills around the town.

The steep, picturesque town of Carcabuey is an undiscovered jewel. In the heart of the Natural Park of Sierras Subbéticas, it offers visitors many attractive itineraries to get closer to nature.

The most attractive routes go through the gorges of *Sierra de Gallinera*, along the *Arroyo Bernabé* or around mountains such as *Pico Lobatejo*. *La Tiñosa*, the highest peak in the province of Cordoba (1,570 meters), is nearby.

Other enchanting places include the hamlet of El Algar, the track from Carcabuey to Luque through the *Alcaide* mountain range with amazing views of *Pico Albuchite*; the picturesque *El Castillejo*; and finally, the fantastic views of *El Calvario*, real treasures of ecotourism in Carcabuey.



Home-made cheese and assorted sausages

Local cuisine and handicrafts

Local cuisine is closely linked to the fresh products of each season, so making the most of top quality local produce all year round. It is one of the most varied, tastiest cuisines in this region, which is why Carcabuey has a lot to offer tourists in terms of its gastronomy.

The most representative dish is a stew based on *habichuelas amonás* (dark beans) with black sausage. Pigs are still slaughtered at home, producing various delicious kinds of sausage. Other outstanding dishes are *patatas a lo pobre* ("poor-style" potatoes), chopped orange in olive oil, *migas* (bread crumbs), *chanfainas* (sort of stew), *salmorejo* and *gazpacho*.



Home-made pastries: *rosquetas, wine roscos, suspiros* ("sighs"), oil *tortas* and puff pastries

Below, traditional fiesta of the Bull of the Rope. Right, streets decorated for the Corpus Christi festivity





The town is also known for its excellent handicrafts, especially those made out of esparto grass used for farm work, wicker baskets, wooden bowls (*dornillos*) for serving *picadillo* (chopped vegetables), a typical local dish, as well as other decorative crafts. Many of the façades are decorated with intricate wrought iron work, which gives the town an attractive stylish appearance.

Feasts

- **Holy Week**, the best-known procession on Good Friday is the *Consejito*, when the faces of the statues of Jesús Nazareno and his mother La Dolorosa meet. The *Pascua de los Moraos* is a carnival celebrated on Easter Sunday, designated an event of National Tourist Interest in Andalusia.
- **Corpus Christi**, altars and carpets with dyed sawdust are laid out along the streets through which the procession passes.
- **Last Saturday in July**, historical re-enactment in the Castle.
- Second half of August, **Royal Fair and Festivities in honour of the Virgin of La Aurora**, celebrated with the traditional *Bull of the Rope*.
- September 8, **festivities in honour of the Patron Saint**, Virgen del Castillo.
- December, traditional pig slaughtering during the **Festivity of the Immaculate Conception**.

Priego de Córdoba



1. Castle
2. *La Villa* district
3. Parish Church of *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*
4. Church of La Aurora
5. Church of San Francisco
6. *Fuente del Rey* (King's fountain)
7. Fuente de la Salud (Fountain of Health)
8. Parish Church of El Carmen
9. Hospital and Church of San Juan de Dios
10. Royal abattoirs
11. Church of Nuestra Señora de las Angustias
12. Church of Las Mercedes
13. Church of San Pedro
14. Town Hall
15. Lozano Sidro house museum. Municipal History Museum
16. Niceto Alcalá-Zamora house-museum
17. Almond Museum (village of Zamoranos)
18. Ethnographic Museum (village of Castil de Campos)

i Tourist Information

Tourist Office
Plaza de la Constitución, 3
Tel. 957 700 625

Niceto Alcalá Zamora house-museum
C/ Río, 33
Tel. 957 556 420

"La Trufa" Mushroom Garden
Ctra. CO-8211 (village of Zagrilla)
Tel. 671 599 562

Municipal History Museum
Carrera de las Monjas, 18
Tel. 957 540 947

Almond Museum
Ctra. A-333, km. 6 (village of Zamoranos)
Tel. 957 556 006



Above, Arch of San Bernardo. Below, general view of the town of Priego

People of all periods appear to have agreed that Priego de Córdoba was an ideal place to settle, a fact confirmed by the prehistoric, Iberian and Roman remains found in the area. Around the year 863, *Baguh*, the Hispano-Arabic name for Priego, was first mentioned as a place in the hills which contributed troops to one of the military campaigns of the Emir Muhammad I. The same source also claims that the *cora* (province) of Priego played an active role in the struggles and revolts at the end of the 9th century. In 889, it became the headquarters of Ibn Mastana, the self-appointed Lord of Priego and Luque, one of the main figures in the insurrection led by Ibn Hafsun. After being conquered and destroyed on various occasions, Priego resurged with the generalized prosperity in the Caliphate. On the demise of the Caliphate, the town fell into the hands of the Zirids of Granada. King Ferdinand III took *Baguh* in 1225 during his campaigns in the upper Guadalquivir valley. Owing to its geographical position on the front line of battle, it





Castle of Priego

was given to the Knights of Calatrava. However, it was to change hands once more in 1327, when it was seized by the Nasrids of Granada in the Knight Commander's absence. In 1340 the fort was captured once and for all by King Alphonso XI, who repaired the walls and repopulated the town.

In 1370 Priego became part of the domains of the Aguilar family and Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba became its overlord; his descendent, Pedro, later became the first Marquis of Priego in 1502. A period of prosperity began, during which many public, private and religious buildings were put up. The 18th century saw the rapid expansion of the textile industry bringing a period of affluence to the town in which it acquired countless Baroque works of art.

Visits

The Castle

Priego's strategic importance was materialized in an impressive defensive system. A simple, functional castle was built by the Muslims on the highest part; it was quadrangular, with an austere Keep in the middle. It underwent numerous alterations by the Christians in the 13th and 14th centuries. Nowadays its outer walls, with three salient towers, overlook a square full of trees. The original entrance, consisting of a pointed horseshoe archway, is also impressive, as are the mullioned windows with little marble columns and capitals in the Granada Mudejar style. These let daylight into the Keep's main chamber, all under a four-sided roof.



Castle Walls



Castle Keep



Santa Ana Street and Square, in *La Villa* district

La Villa district

The Medieval town is on the eastern side of the castle, full of twisted, secret little streets and small squares. In the incredibly narrow, complicated labyrinth formed by the streets of Santiago, Jazmines, Real, Bajondillo and Puerta del Sol, you hardly have to stretch your arms to touch both sides of the street.



El Adarve Balcony

The oldest part of town is high up on the top of a cliff and offers great views from the *Balcón del Adarve, a walk around the Walls*. The narrow, winding streets of *La Villa* lead out from the square in front of the castle and must not be missed. From here on, the route is dotted with amazing Baroque masterpieces: from the Churches of La Aurora and San Francisco to the squares of San Pedro, Andalucía and La Constitución. The modern extension to the town begins along Calle Río, which follows the course of the stream produced by a natural spring, and Carrera de las Monjas street.

Wall and towers

Apart from the castle, Priego was furnished with a large defensive system of walls and towers that protected the medina at its most vulnerable points. A few parts of the wall can still be seen. Around the town they built a protective circle of forts such as *Jardín del Moro* and watchtowers such as *El Puerto*, *El Morchón*, *El Esparragal* and *Uclés* where, among other things, various Almohad grain silos have been excavated.

Parish Church of La Asunción

This church stands within sight of the castle, sheltered by the houses of *La Villa*. Building started at the beginning of the 16th century in Gothic-Mudejar style, although it was substantially remodelled in the 18th century by Jerónimo Sánchez de Rueda.

Church of La Asunción





Church of San Francisco

Church of San Francisco

This church was begun in 1515 and refurbished in Baroque style in the 18th century. It stands in front of the mansion once inhabited by Alonso de Carmona, the man who accompanied Hernando de Soto in 1539 in his exploration of Florida.

Church of La Aurora

Not far from the Church of La Asunción we come to another Baroque landmark. Built over the 15th-century chapel devoted to San Nicasio, the town's patron saint, this church was built between 1744 and 1772, with the possible participation of Juan de Dios Santaella.

Other churches worthy of mention are those of San Pedro, San Juan de Dios, Nuestra Señora de las Angustias, Mercedes, and also the Chapels of Belén and Calvario.

Interior of the Church of La Aurora



Southern Cordoba Baroque

The 18th century was a time of great economic success in the Subbética area and in particular in Priego, which became one of the main silk-producing regions in the country. This prosperity brought spectacular artistic development, to the point that Cordoba developed its own variation of Baroque art. The elaborate decoration typical of this style was the result of the particular skills of the local artisans who, in keeping with the popular Mudejar tradition, were used to working with light, pliable materials, such as plaster and wood.

Many of the town's churches and mansions were built during this period and new public spaces were laid out; a whole generation of artists emerged such as Hurtado Izquierdo, Pedrajas and Santaella. Their artistic excellence, particularly in plasterwork, reached heights that were difficult to surpass, putting Southern Cordoba Baroque on a par with the principal centres of European Baroque.

A trip through this area could well become a Baroque Route, its main attractions being Priego –in which the greatest examples are *El Sagrario de la Asunción*, the Church of La Aurora and *Fuente del Rey*– Cabra and Lucena, without forgetting other neighbouring towns which also have a remarkable 18th-century heritage.



Above, tabernacle of the Church of La Asunción. Below, ornamental detail in the Church of San Pedro





Fuente del Rey (King's fountain)

Royal abattoirs



Church of San Pedro, Río Street and Fuente del Rey

Moving beyond *La Villa*, there is much to interest the traveller. For instance, the Royal Abattoir, a harmonious construction from 1579 with a portico and a courtyard with arcades. Nearby are the churches of San Pedro, from the end of the 17th century with a valuable altarpiece; and San Juan de Dios, built between 1696 and 1717.

Many buildings of interest stand along the winding, enchanting Río Street, such as the Chapel of Las Angustias, several mansions, the house where Niceto Alcalá-Zamora –the first president of the 2nd Spanish Republic– was born, an interesting example of late 19th-century civil architecture. There is also the Church of El Carmen, an example of the symbiosis of Baroque and Neo-classicism. Río Street starts at the fountains of *El Rey* and *La Salud*, splendid feats of architecture and engineering that channel a natural spring.



Above, interior of the Municipal Museum. Below, Adolfo Lozano Sidro Museum

Municipal Museum

This is an archaeological museum with valuable collections of pieces found during excavations in Priego and its surrounding area. They are displayed in chronological order from the Paleolithic up to the Middle Ages. The Museum is in the Adolfo Lozano Sidro Cultural Centre, although there is a plan to move it to the site of an old mill near the town castle.

There are plenty of well-preserved complete pottery objects dating from the al-Andalus period. Many of them were found in the archaeological excavations of *Madinat Baguh*, the ancient Islamic city of Priego.





Above, outside "La Trufa" Mushroom Garden. Below left, the Almond Museum. Right, house-museum of Niceto Alcala-Zamora

Other museums

In Priego we can also visit the birthplace of the President of the Republic Niceto Alcala-Zamora and the house-museum of the local painter Adolfo Lozano Sidro (1872-1935), one of the great illustrators of the 20th century.

We could also pay a visit to the Contemporary Spanish Landscape Centre "Antonio Povedano", to the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions, in the village of Castil de Campos, to the Almond Museum in Zamoranos, or to the Andalusian Mushroom Centre, (Jardín Micológico "La Trufa) in the village of Zagrilla.







La Villa district

Priego and al-Idrisi

In the 12th century, the geographer al-Idrisi, from Ceuta, praised Priego's natural wealth: "Priego is a town with a small area, but very pleasant because of the amount of running water. These waters move many mills inside the villa, whose territory, covered by vineyards and orchards, could hardly be more fertile."



Landscape around Priego de Córdoba



Landscape around Priego de Córdoba

Surrounding area

The scenery varies in the surrounding hills, where there are some delightful hamlets worth visiting, such as *Lagunillas*, to the south, at the foot of *La Tiñosa* mountain (1570 m), or *El Esparragal*, to the north, with its picturesque neighbourhood of *Bajondillo*, where visitors can admire the medieval towers of *Barcas*, *Cañuelo*, *Torre Alta* and *Almedinilla*, which lends its name to a neighbouring village.



Jardín del Moro (Moor's garden)



Scrambled eggs with bladder campions

Local cuisine and handicrafts

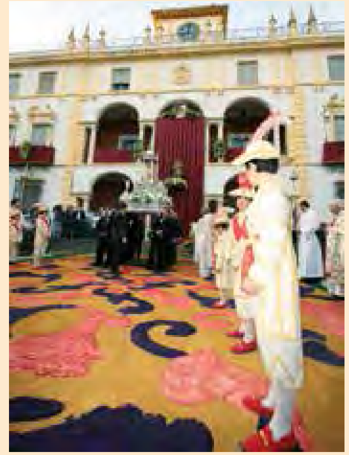
We should note the excellence of local extra virgin olive oil (Priego de Cordoba Designation of Origin), the basic ingredient of all the dishes cooked in this region. Local cooks have created delicious dishes such as *relleno* de *Carnaval*, meat balls and stews for Easter, turkey with almonds, *salmorejo* (tomato and bread cream), *ajo arriero* (cod, eggs and garlic), *morcilla de seso* (brains sausage), *lomos* (pork loins) and other pork joints. Confectionery includes *cuajado de almendra* –the star dessert in Priego–, *piñonate*, quince preserve, *mostachos, polvorones* and *hornazos*. *Arresoli*, a characteristic Priego liqueur, is made from "Pero Ruiz" apples.

Wood-carving and wrought ironwork are the two main pillars of craftsmanship in Priego. Even today there are workshops that continue a centuries-old tradition of restoration, furniture-making, carving of religious





Above, wood-carving. Left, olive oil tasting





Above, Corpus Christi festivity. Right, Carnival in Priego de Córdoba

figures and gilding, and whose products are in high demand all over Andalusia. The wood-carvers of Priego are renowned for their Granada Baroque style (*barroca granadina*), evident in many of the objects, altarpieces, furniture and cornucopias to be found in the town's churches and homes.

Artistic craftsmanship in a variety of materials has also survived in Priego. These include plasterwork, textiles, esparto, leatherwork, miniatures and stone and marble carving.

Feasts

- **Holy week**, with many processions and exquisite images. Friday morning with Jesús Nazareno's ascent to Calvary is of special interest.
- **May feasts**, concerts of religious music and processions.
- **Corpus Christi**, procession through La Villa.
- June, third Sunday, **pilgrimage to the *Virgen de la Cabeza***, hamlet of La Concepción.
- August, **festivities in the different neighbourhoods of Priego**.
- September 1-5, **main fair of Priego**.
- Mid-September, **festivities of La Aurora and Los Dolores**. The Aurora fraternity goes out every Saturday at midnight to sing to the Virgin.
- December 14, **feast of San Nicasio**, the local patron saint.
- There are **many cultural events** throughout the year: International Theatre Festival, Music and Dance Festival, Cultural Week in Spring, etc.

Alcalá la Real



1. *La Mota* Fortress Complex
2. Abbey Church of Santa María la Mayor de la Mota
3. Church of Santo Domingo de Silos
4. Church of San Juan
5. Church of La Consolación
6. *Las Trinitarias* Convent
7. *Casas de Enfrente*
8. Church of Nuestra Señora de las Angustias
9. Church and Convent of La Encarnación
10. Abbey Museum and Palace
11. *Pilar de los Álamos* (Poplars' pillar)
12. Church of San Antón
13. Capuchins Convent – Library
14. Chapel of Fatima
15. Real Street
16. Chapel of Ecce Homo – Santa Cruz
17. Town Hall

ⓘ Tourist Information

Tourist Office
Palacio Abacial
Abbey Palace
953 582 077

La Mota Fortress Information Point
953 102 717



Aerial view of La Mota Fortress

This bustling town and its fortress were a key part of the defence of the historic road between Cordoba and Granada. Alcalá is positioned on a strategic hill in the middle of the natural corridor that connects the two provinces, as it winds its way through the Baetic mountains range in the province of Jaén.

The population of this area increased significantly after the arrival of the Muslims. From 713 various Arab clans settled in the region as the governing aristocracy. The name of this walled town *al-Qalat* –the fortress– (with other versions such as *Qalat Astalir* or *Qalat Yahsub*) crops up frequently in the following centuries due to the important role it played.

It was initially part of the *cora* (province) of Ilbira and of the Zirid Kingdom of Granada in the *taifa* period. The high point of its history as part of al-Andalus came in the 12th century, when it became an independent domain between 1135 and 1149 under the rule of the Banu Said family, who managed to break away from

View of the fortress of Alcalá la Real with the town below





17th-century painting of Alcalá la Real

the Almoravids. Now known by the family name of its overlords, *Qalat Ibn Said*, it underwent a period of prosperity and great cultural activity in which many well-known figures linked to the reigning Banu Said family appeared in the town's political and literary life.

In the 13th century, with the demise of the Almoravid Empire, Alcalá and its territory changed hands on numerous occasions due to its position on the front line of the war between Christian and Muslim armies.

Alphonso XI of Castile finally took Alcalá in 1341. The Crown kept direct control of the town and established an abbey there, under royal patronage. It soon became the main headquarters from which to undertake the conquest of Granada.

Visits

La Mota Fortress

This medieval fortress stands majestic on top of a hill overlooking the present-day town. It was begun by the first Muslim settlers in 727 and was extended and reinforced by the Almohads and Nasrids between the 12th and 13th centuries, with successive refurbishments by the Christians up to the 16th century. From then on it was allowed to decay and was progressively abandoned. The damage it suffered during the War of Independence in the 19th century hastened its final desertion.

Archaeological excavations in *La Mota* Fortress







Above, view of *La Mota* Fortress and Sierra Nevada. Below, underground passage in *La Mota*

A steep slope leads up the hill to *La Mota* through three gateways: *La Puerta de las Lanzas*, a Renaissance Gate from the end of the 16th century, the monumental gate-tower of *La Imagen*, named after its image of Santa María, and El *Peso de la Harina* Gate. The most significant buildings and areas in the town were located just beyond this gate. Their remains can still be seen in the mesh of streets formed by *Despeñacaballos* Street, *Plaza Alta, Torre de la Cárcel* and *Bahondillo* with its cave dwellings.

There are also some interesting relics of industrial architecture within the walled area: mills, water cisterns, cellars and a snow store.







At the highest point of *La Mota* hill stands the *Alcazaba* –the military stronghold of the medina–, a solid castle with an elbow-shaped entrance under the Keep, which is over 20 meters high.

The Keep could also be accessed from outside the walls via an underground passage. If you walk along this passage you pass the well that supplied water to the city. Despite the apparent impregnability of the town, this was to prove its weak point that led to its surrender.

Abbey Church

The parish church of Santa María la Mayor, formerly the Abbey of Alcalá la Real, stands high above the fortress of *La Mota*, due to its imposing 42 metre-high tower.

This enormous church was built between 1530 and 1627 on the site of a mosque, over which a Gothic church had been built. Particularly notable are its hewn stone vaults, its grand doorways and reliefs, the Sacristy and the Dean's Chapel. Excavations in the floor of the Church have revealed a great deal about the different civilizations that inhabited this area, as confirmed in the fascinating documentary film projected on the walls entitled *Life on the Border*.

La Mota Fortress.
Left. Gate of the *Alcazaba*.
Above, underground galleries

Inside the Abbey Church

Old Town on the side of *La Mota*



Church of San Juan

Situated outside the walls of *La Mota*, the Church of San Juan is in a charming corner where the Old Town begins. Extended from what was a country chapel at the end of the 16th and 17th centuries, it is a very popular church; it is home to the Cristo de la Salud statue and is the setting for many of the Easter week and San Juan festivities.



Church of La Consolación

This is the most important church in Alcalá, home to its patron saint, Virgen de las Mercedes. Although it began life as a Franciscan foundation at the beginning of the 16th century, it was continued and completed in several stages between the late 16th and 18th centuries.



Left, Church of La Consolación. Above, façade of the Abbey Palace



Detail of a façade typical of the regionalist architecture of Alcalá

Town Hall and *'Casas de Enfrente'* (The Houses Opposite)

The Town Hall square has two buildings with arcades, both completed around 1735, whose façades are nearly symmetrical. One is the Town Hall moved down from *La Mota* and the other *Las Casas de Enfrente* "the houses opposite", comprising a market and private houses. The Church of Las Angustias is nearby.



Pilar de los Álamos (Fountain of the Poplars)

El Llanillo

The centre of both the old and the modern town, it has various remarkable buildings, such as La Encarnación Church and Convent, the Abbey Palace and a spectacular fountain called *Pilar de los Alamos*, alongside other lay buildings, especially regionalist architecture houses from the beginning of the 20th century.



Plaza del Arcipreste de Hita with the Town Hall in the background



The Abbey Palace Museum



Abbey Palace, Municipal Museum

This Baroque palace was commissioned in 1781 by the Abbot Esteban Lorenzo de Mendoza y Gatica. This building was produced by knocking together several houses and transforming and unifying the façade.

The Palace has a peaceful courtyard divided into three parts. It currently houses the Municipal Museum, whose collection includes the magnificent treasure of *Ermita Nueva*, a unique collection of jewellery and coins dating from the times of the Caliphate.

Above, set of 10th century Caliphate era coins found in Ermita Nueva. Below, medieval room in the Abbey Palace Museum





La Mota Fortress at night

Alcalá la Real

According to Ibn Said al-Magribi, born in Alcalá, al-Himyari described the town in the 12th century as: “Rock of al-Andalus, it clings to the brooches of heaven to get the fruits of glory and majesty. It is a fortress from which to wage holy war and a castle for dukes and lords.”

For his part, al-Umari described the fortress as “a castle that arose out of the clouds and bordered on the stars, challenging the winds, shaking hands with the Pleiades palm to palm, and rising in such a way that the dawn appeared in it. In the gateway Mars was shining without boasting of a lamp.”

Panoramic view of Alcalá la Real





Vineyard and watchtower in the town of Alcalá la Real

Surrounding area

The area around Alcalá has about 16 hamlets and many farmsteads in attractive surroundings. Particularly worth visiting are *La Hoya de Charilla* –where a treasure dating from the al-Andalus era was discovered–, *El Robledo, Fuente del Rey* with its chapel and covered washing place, the banks of the *Velillos* river, *Mures*, *Ermita Nueva* or *La Pedriza*, which has the only Astronomical Observatory in the Sierra Sur region. This endless landscape of olive groves is dotted with watchtowers, legacy of its time on the Christian-Muslim frontier.

Rural landscapes







Local cuisine and handicrafts

The gastronomy in Alcalá la Real is closely linked to the town's traditions and festivities. At Christmas time the visitor can taste the pastries made with pork lard and almonds, the various pork products (chorizo, spicy and blood sausage…), and others conserved in olive oil (pork loin, ribs…). During the *Candelaria* fiestas, meringue pies are typical, as well as *Relleno* (bread crumbs, meat and egg boiled in pork lard), in Carnival. During Holy Week, pastries are quite popular: *pestiños, roscos de vino* (wine roscos), rice and milk pudding, *papuecas*…

Jarretes alcalaínos (Alcalá style shanks)







Left, *borrachuelos*, typical cakes in Alcalá la Real. Above, traditional glazed pottery

When summertime arrives, the people of Alcalá make stews to share with friends in the countryside, such as a soupy rice casserole or a *secretaria* (tomato sauce, asparagus, mushroom and chicken), while autumn is a time for quince jelly preserve, fig bread and local wines.

Alcalá la Real has recently recovered a once important industry in the area, wine, and new artisan products such as cheese and beer have been introduced. It is also known for its ceramics with glazed earthenware, in local or Granada style, for use in the kitchen and for decorative purposes. The tradition of embroidery still



Above, embroidery handicrafts. Left, Cross in Calle Rosa during the traditional Cross festivity



Right, Holy Week *Juíllas* and *sayones*. Far right, "Night of the drums"

survives today, with the production of *mantillas* and lace. An interesting tourist attraction is *La Hilandera* palace, a mansion dating from the beginning of the 20th century with an exhibition of textile handicrafts.

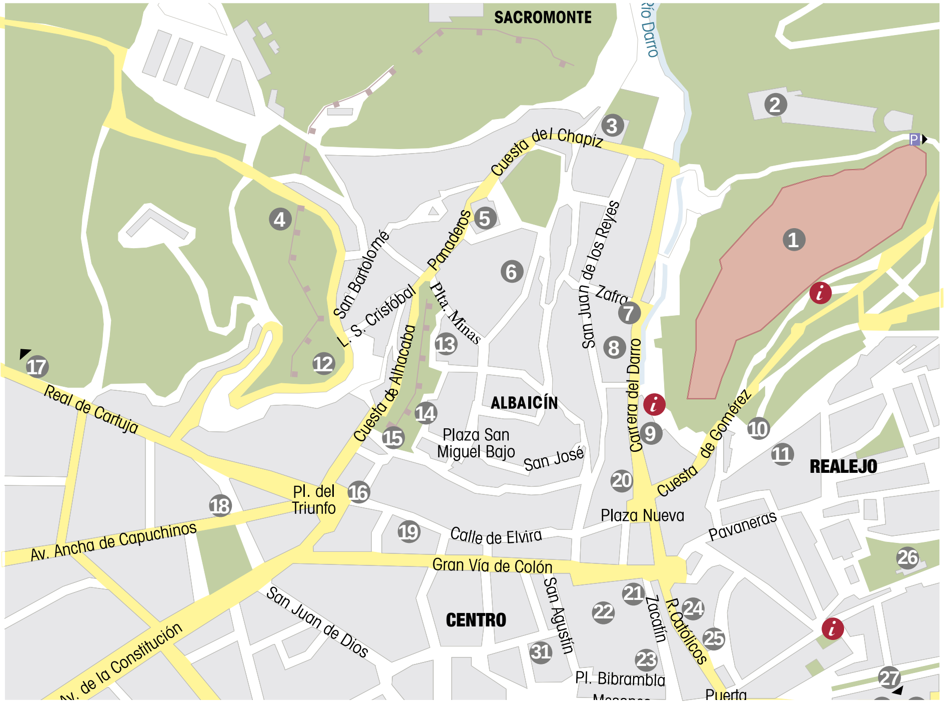
Feasts

- **Feast of San Antón** between Christmas and January.
- February 2, **La Candelaria**, during which bonfires are lit.
- February, **carnival**.
- March 18, celebration of the **Night of the Drums**. Large bonfires are lit in front of the niches in Calle Abad Palomino and Calle Oteros.
- **Holy Week**, a celebration of great ethnological interest. The Good Friday processions have people wearing face masks and curious characters such as *Juillas* and *sayones*.
- May 15, **pilgrimage of San Isidro**.
- June 13, feast of **San Antonio**.
- June 24, **feast of San Juan**, a rag witch is burnt on the eve.
- August 15, **festivity of Virgen de las Mercedes**.
- September 21-25, main **fair of San Mateo**.
- Second weekend in July, **Etnosur**. A music festival with a range of cultural activities which has become well-known at national and international level.





Granada



1. The Alhambra
2. Generalife
3. Casa del Chapiz
4. Walls of the Albayzin district
5. Church of El Salvador
6. San Nicolás viewpoint
7. Provincial Archaeological Museum
8. El Bañuelo Arab baths
9. Church of Santa Ana
10. Torres Bermejas
11. Rodríguez-Acosta Foundation
12. Church of San Cristóbal
13. Las Pesas (weights) Arch
14. Dar al-Horra Palace
15. Monaita Gate
16. Elvira Gate
17. La Cartuja Monastery
18. Royal Hospital
19. Church of San Andrés
20. Real Chancillería (Royal Chancery)
21. La Madrasa Palace
22. Cathedral and Royal Chapel
23. Alcaicería (old market)
24. Corral del Carbón
25. City Hall
26. Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo
27. Hermitage of San Sebastián
28. Alcázar del Genil
29. Parque de las Ciencias (Science Museum)
30. Memory of Andalusia Museum
31. Federico García Lorca Centre

i Tourist Information

Tourist Information Office
C/ Cárcel Baja, 3
Tel. 958 247 128

C/ Santa Ana 4
Tel. 958 575 202

Council of La Alhambra and Generalife
C/ Real de la Alhambra s/n
Tel. 958 027 971

Archaeological Museum
Carrera del Darro, 41-43
Tel. 600 143 141

Science Museum
Avda. de la Ciencia s/n.
Tel. 958 13 19 00

Foundation El legado andalusí
C/ Mariana Pineda S/N
Edif. Corral del Carbón
Tel. 958 225 995

The Memory of Andalusia Museum
Avda. de la Ciencia, 2
Tel. 958 222 257



Tiles with the Nasrid emblem, in the Alhambra

Landscape of Granada with Sierra Nevada in the background

Granada is situated in a perfect spot at a historical crossroads between the routes connecting the Mediterranean coast and the Upper reaches of the Guadalquivir, and those between the East Coast of Spain and Lower Andalusia. This exceptional location, its unusual landscape and the contrast between the snowy peaks of Sierra Nevada and the sub-tropical areas on the coast have combined with the different civilizations that settled here to create the present-day city of Granada.

The earliest settlement in this area dates back to around 7th century BC, when the Iberian village of *Iliberis* was established in the highest part of the Albayzin. Later, in the year 45 BC, it was made a Roman *municipium* under the name *Florentinum Iliberritanum*. However, if there is one era of history with which Granada is constantly associated, it is the long period of Muslim rule. During the Caliphate of Córdoba, *Madinat Ilbira*, about ten kilometers away from the current city of Granada, was



the capital of the *cora* or Muslim province. However, it was abandoned in the 11th century when the Caliphate disintegrated and the area's new rulers, the Zirids, decided to move, together with the inhabitants of *Ilbira*, to their new capital *Garnata*.

From *Madinat Ilbira* to Garnata

The geographer al-Idrisi, born in Ceuta in the 12th century, describes this event: "The *medina* of *Garnata* was founded in the days when the great lords of al-Andalus declared themselves independent. The capital was *Ilbira*, whose inhabitants emigrated to *Garnata*."

The city was ruled by the Zirid dynasty until 1090 and by the Almoravids and Almohads from 1090 to 1232. In the 13th century, the founder of the Nasrid dynasty, Muhammad Yusuf Ibn Nasr established a new Emirate in Granada (1232-1492), marking the start of a brilliant era of artistic and cultural splendour. In 1492, the capture of the city by the Christian King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella brought an end to the last Muslim stronghold in the Iberian Peninsula.

The Christians built a vast array of churches, monasteries, palaces and other buildings, so adding a splendid artistic ensemble of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles to the wonderful legacy of al-Andalus.



Earthenware bowl with a horse motif. Found in *Madinat Ilbira*. Granada Archaeology Museum.



Granada in 1431, in a fresco depicting the Battle of *La Higueruela*. Monastery of El Escorial



View of the Alhambra from the Sacromonte district

Visits

The Alhambra and the Generalife

The jewel in the crown of Granada is undoubtedly, the palace city of the Alhambra –its name derives from *al-Hamra*, the red one–, built on the Sabika hill, facing the Albayzin district.

The Alhambra served as a palace, citadel and fortress for the Nasrid Sultans and their high-ranking officials, court servants and elite soldiers. Probably preceded by an earlier building, most likely of Roman origin, it was the Nasrids that shaped the Alhambra we know today.

There are three historic footpaths connecting the Alhambra with the city: the *Cuesta del Realejo* in the Realejo district, the *Cuesta del Rey Chico*, which connects the Alhambra with the Albayzin and Sacromonte districts, and the most common route from the city centre, the *Cuesta de Gomérez*. They all run through the Woods of the Alhambra, the city's natural lung. Visitors arriving by car can reach the Alhambra from the ring-road around Granada and park near the monument.



Woods of the Alhambra and the old Gate of Bib-Rambla



The Alhambra at night from the San Nicolas viewpoint

The palace city of the Alhambra, with an area of approximately one hundred thousand square metres, is surrounded by a perimeter wall that separates it from the city of Granada. The imposing monumental complex is structured around three main areas: the *Alcazaba* (residential-military premises), the *Qars al-Sultan* (fortified palaces) and *the medina* (where members of the court lived). All these areas are of undoubted interest and have many entrances through towers, gates and streets.

The best way into the palace city is through the *Gate of Justice*, the most spectacular gate into the complex and a monument in itself. It has various important symbolic motifs, such as the Hand of Fatima, which represents the principles of Islamic law, and a key, the symbol of Nasrid power. Walking through this gate, the visitor enters the walled city with its buildings, gardens, squares and palaces. If we then walk towards the well-known *Puerta del Vino* (Gate of Wine), the *Palace of Charles V* comes into sight on our right, a stunning bastion of the new imperial power. Built in Renaissance style with a square floor-plan, it was designed by Pedro Machuca, a painter, sculptor and architect who worked in Italy alongside Michelangelo. Outstanding reliefs on the main façade precede an elegant circular courtyard around which there are galleries housing the *Granada Fine Arts Museum* and the *Museum of the Alhambra*.

Interior of the Palace of Charles V





The Nasrid palaces seen from the Generalife

Opposite the Palace of Charles V is the *Alcazaba* (fortress) with its bell-tower (*Torre de la Vela*) overlooking the city and the Vega (the fertile plains) around Granada. Triangular in shape and consisting of several towers and fragments of walls, the *Alcazaba* clearly had defensive purposes, as well as serving as a residence for the soldiers that guarded the Sultan and the city.

Interior of the *Alcazaba* (fortress) with the military district



Next to the Palace of Charles V we come to the *Nasrid Palaces*, built by different Sultans over almost two and a half centuries. They have three main areas: the *Mexuar, Comares* and the *Court of the Lions*. The *Mexuar*, the oldest of all the surviving palaces, was the Sultan's throne-room for several periods. The architectural and decorative structure of this hall was severely altered after the Christian conquest of Granada. The courtyard and porch of the *Cuarto Dorado* (Golden Room) are also stunning, with its intricate plasterwork decoration and marble fountain in the centre. The Sultan also conducted audiences with his subjects here. The tour continues in the *Comares Palace*, the private residence of the Sultan and his family, which welcomes visitors with a rich façade adorned with geometric and plant motifs. As they enter the *Patio de los Arrayanes* (Court of the Myrtles), they will be captivated by the impressive pool surrounded by a hedge that has been planted with myrtles since Nasrid times, introducing nature into the palace in a subtle and symbolic way. This is a sublime architectural space with different



Façade of *Comares* Palace



Ceiling over the Hall of Ambassadors



Court of the Myrtles with the Throne Room in the background



Star-shaped dome formed by *muqarnas* in the Hall of the *Abencerrajes*

features of the domestic architecture of al-Andalus at every turn. At the northern end of the Courtyard is the *Sala de la Barca* (Hall of the Boat), which is covered by a semicircular dome with geometric, wheel and star motifs. This leads on to the *Salón del Trono* (the Throne Room) also known as the Hall of the Ambassadors, the most outstanding indoor space in the Palace. It is a magnificent example of harmonized proportions and all its surfaces are covered by exquisite decoration. The ceiling is particularly striking, demonstrating the incredible skill of the woodcarvers who produced over 8,000 different geometric pieces, which when fitted together represent the immensity of Cosmos and Creation.

Another outstanding place in the Palaces is the hammam or *Bath of Comares*, the only medieval Islamic bath that has survived virtually intact in the West.



Court of the Lions

The *Court of Lions* or Court of the Garden, surrounded by several arcaded galleries, houses the most famous fountain in the Alhambra. This was a palatial residence consisting of various halls known as the *Kings, Mocárabes, Two Sisters* and *Abencerrajes*.

This palace, built by Muhammad V, is the best example of the splendour of Nasrid decoration. A forest of slender columns supports plaster lacework and spectacular *muqarnas* that impregnate the environment with exquisite taste and subtlety for the enjoyment and pleasant contemplation of life. This palace is built around a recently-restored fountain formed by twelve white marble lions, a symbol of power associated with the continuous murmur of water as the source of life.

Part of the Palace was converted into a Christian Royal House when Emperor Charles V visited Granada in 1529, with various spaces being fitted out for the purpose, such as the *Emperor's Study, the Courtyard of Lindaraja, the Queen's Balcony* or *the Imperial Rooms*,



Forest of columns in the Court of the Lions





Above, Court of *Lindaraja*. Right, pool of *El Partal* and Moorish houses

that served later on, in 1829 as both accommodation and inspiration for the American writer Washington Irving, the author of the *Tales of the Alhambra*.

Continuing the tour we reach the palace of *El Partal*, a space dominated by a large pool and gardens of great natural beauty. It also houses an interesting oratory and small Moorish houses that still preserve some figurative mural paintings dating from the Nasrid period.

Quite nearby is the cemetery where the Sultans were buried, known as the *Rauda*.

Pool and oratory in *El Partal*







Above, the Generalife.
Below, aerial view of the Alhambra

Granada, elevation for the soul

"Granada is the Damascus of al-Andalus, pasture for the eyes, elevation for the soul. It has an impregnable fortress with high walls and splendid buildings. It is distinguished by the peculiarity of its river, which is distributed around homes, baths, souks, exterior and interior mills and gardens.

God has adorned it by placing it on top of a vast fertile plain, where the silver ingots of the streams branch out between the emerald of the trees."

Al-Saqundi, Lawyer from Cordoba
(13th century)

The *Paseo de las Torres* (Path of the Towers) runs from *El Partal* along the eastern end of the wall towards the Generalife. It is named after a series of emblematic towers with poetic names: *Tower of the Brackets, Tower of the Captive, Tower of the Princesses, Tower of the Water* and *Tower of the Governor*. Situated outside the walls of the Alhambra on the *Cerro del Sol* (Sun Hill), stands the *Generalife*, an old *almunia* or country estate for the Nasrid Sultans.

Formed by vegetable gardens, irrigation channels, fountains and gardens, it offers excellent views back towards the Alhambra. In the Nasrid era it was a country estate where the Sultan could rest. Its many attractive spaces include the Court of the Cypress of the Sultan's wife, the Water Staircase and the Court of the Water-Channel, a source of inspiration for painters, architects, travellers, musicians and poets like Alexander Dumas, Sorolla, Manuel de Falla or Juan Ramon Jimenez.

Above, view of El Generalife, with its gardens. Below, a view of El Generalife from *Paseo de las Torres*





From the River Darro to the Albayzin

The city of Granada bustles at the foot of the Alhambra, full of places to visit and lively streets. From the *Plaza Nueva*, with the harmonious façade of the *Real Chancillería* (Royal Chancery), visitors who stroll along the *Carrera del Darro* are certain to find many interesting monuments and picturesque corners to admire on their way to the Albayzin.

El Bañuelo or *El Nogal* Arab baths were built around the 11th century and certainly deserve a visit, as does the Archaeological Museum in the plateresque house of Castril, and many other ancient Nasrid and *Morisco* houses in the Albayzin district, such as *Casa de Zafra* or *Casas del Chapiz*. We must also remember the Christian heritage of this district, as seen in buildings like the *Churches of Santa Ana, San Pedro and San Pablo*, or the numerous *Convents*, such as *La Concepción* and *Santa Isabel la Real*.

The Albayzin district, on the hill opposite the Alhambra, is where the essence of the ancient city of al-Andalus lingers strongest. It is shaped by countless cobbled alleys, unexpected corners in labyrinthine streets,



Courtyard in the Royal Chancery

Below, a decorative detail of the coffered ceiling in the Casa de Zafra. Left, interior of the Arabic Bath, known as "El Bañuelo"







View of the Albayzin from the Alhambra

Street in the Albayzin



The Albayzin

"The Albayzin piles up on the hill, raising its towers full of Mudejar charm... There is an infinite outer harmony... Streets are narrow, dramatic, there are strange and rickety stairs, waving tentacles that twist whimsical and wearily, leading to small bastions from where one can admire the awesome snowy ridges of the sierra or the splendid and definitive chord of the fertile plains."

Federico García Lorca



Church of El Salvador, ancient mosque of the Albayzin

houses with terraced gardens (Carmenes) or exceptional viewpoints such as *San Cristobal* or *Mirador de San Nicolas*, definitely the best place to admire an incredible panoramic view of the Alhambra with the backdrop of Sierra Nevada.

The district, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, is home to the *Palace of Dar al-Horra, Aljibe del Rey*, the *churches of El Salvador* and *San Juan de los Reyes*, –formerly mosques–, the popular *Plaza Larga*, the well-known *Arco de las Pesas* (Arch of the Weights) or the famous gypsy district of *Sacromonte*, well-known for its *Abbey*, the popular caves and typical flamenco folklore.

From the Centre to the River Genil

Walking down from the Albayzin along the *Carril de la Lona* and *Cuesta de la Alhacaba*, we will come to *Elvira Gate*, one of the ancient entrances to the walled city in the times of al-Andalus. Nearby, Christian buildings such as the *Hospital Real*, currently part of the University of Granada or *San Jeronimo Monastery* are fine examples of Renaissance art.

Elvira Gate





Above, tomb of the Catholic Kings. Below, façade of the *Corral del Carbón*

Adjacent to Granada's main street, the Gran Vía, is the *Cathedral*, which was started in 1523 in the Gothic style. The project was adapted by the architect Diego de Siloe, who designed a magnificent classical building in which Alonso Cano, a renowned sculptor from Granada, also took part. Adjoining the Cathedral are the *Merchants' Hall* and the *Royal Chapel*, built in Isabelline Gothic style, the last resting-place of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, known in Spanish history as the Catholic Kings.

Opposite the Merchants' Hall is the old Arab university or *Madrasa*, built by the Nasrid King Yusuf I in 1349 as a centre of scholarship. Alongside is the bustling *Alcaicería*, the ancient "clothing market", famous for the silk trade, and *the Corral del Carbon*, the Nasrid grain store. Wheat was traded in this building in the 14th century, which also served as a warehouse and as lodgings for the merchants. It was an interesting *funduq*-type building that still preserves its arcaded courtyard and an exquisite façade adorned with horseshoe arches, *muqarnas* and paintings.





Courtyard inside the *Corral del Carbón*

We are now quite near other crucial points of the city such as *Zacatín*, *Plaza del Carmen*, the City Hall, *Puerta Real*, and the attractive squares of *Bib-Rambla* and *Las Pasiegas*, next to the García Lorca centre and the Food Market.

Left, *alcaicería* (ancient silk market). Below, fountain in Bib-Rambla square





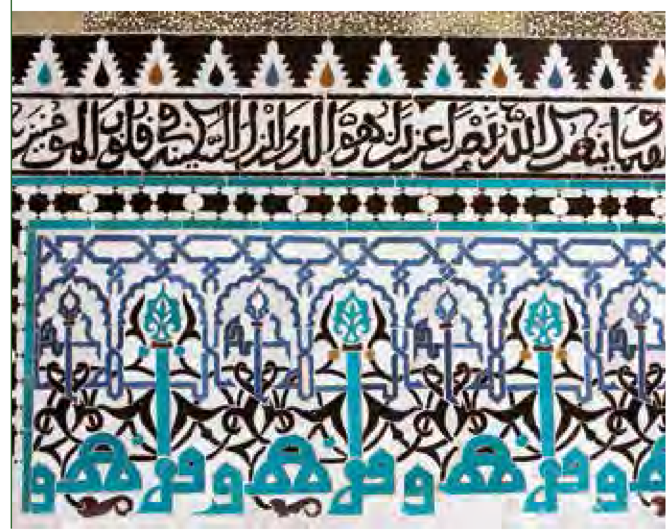


Interior of the *qubba* in the *Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo*

From the Antequeruela to the Genil river

Walking down through the woods of the Alhambra, the *Mauror* –the old Jewish quarter– and the *Antequeruela* –with *carmenes* such as *the Rodriguez Acosta Foundation* and the *Manuel de Falla's House-museum*–, we come to the popular *Campo del Principe*, an open, welcoming space for locals and visitors alike. Not far away, in the heart of the Realejo district, we find the *Casa de los Tiros* and Churches such as Santo Domingo and San Cecilio. We can also visit the *Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo*, which was part of the Nasrid estate. Built in the 13th century, it was conceived as a place to relax linked to a garden-orchard. It has a lookout tower attached to the old city walls and a garden. Inside the main pavilion, there is a *qubba* or audience room with a richly decorated wooden ceiling. The *Cuarto Real*, which has recently been restored, also has fascinating tiles, plasterwork and paintings.

Walking on towards the *Carrera del Genil*, we pass the Baroque church of Las Angustias, patron saint of the city and the *Paseo del Salón*, which takes us to a bridge



Tiling in the *Cuarto Real de Santo Domingo*



over the River Genil built during the Zirid era. A little further on, we come to the *Chapel of San Sebastian*, which was originally a Muslim *marabout* built in the Almohad period. Nearby is the *Alcázar del Genil*, a sumptuous palace that belonged to the Nasrid royal family. Surrounded by orchards, this royal estate was for both recreational and agricultural purposes. Various features have been preserved, such as an interesting *qubba* and the remains of a vast pond, over 122 meters long, which was only recently discovered.

In the same neighbourhood as the Alcazar Genil is the *Parque de las Ciencias* (Science Museum), where science, learning and education go hand in hand. It houses inside the Pavilion of al-Andalus and Science, where the Public Foundation El legado andalusí displays a permanent exhibition that brings to visitors the history of al-Andalus and Arabic science.

Above, inside the Alcázar Genil. Below, Chapel of San Sebastián





Above, one of the halls in the Pavilion of Al-Andalus and Science (El legado andalusí Foundation). Below, Monastery of La Cartuja



Surrounding area

On the outskirts of Granada we should also visit the *Museum of the Memory of Andalusia* and the *Cartuja Monastery*, one of the most brilliant works of 18th century Andalusian Baroque.

The memory of the great Spanish poet Federico García Lorca is very much alive in the *Huerta de San Vicente*, where his family spent their summers. Visitors experience the atmosphere of the house as it was in Lorca's time.

No visit to Granada would be complete without a trip up to the peaks of the Natural Park of Sierra Nevada, *Solair* or Snow Mountain, 36 km away from Granada. The silhouette of the Sierra forms a backdrop to the Granada skyline. It is crowned by Mulhacén –3,482 m–, the highest peak in the Iberian Peninsula, named after the Nasrid Sultan Muley Hacen.





Above, a traditional bar in Granada. Right, a craftsman making a guitar



"Sacromonte" omelette

Local cuisine and handicrafts

The assorted delights of the ancient Nasrid capital have an appetizing gastronomic side that must not be overlooked. Recipes based on lamb, vegetables of the highest quality grown in the nearby Vega (fertile plain by the river), unusual combinations of spices and flavours, confectionery and other specialties, are all examples of a tradition that is deeply rooted in the cuisine of al-Andalus. This gastronomic tradition is completed with other equally substantial contributions such as salads and *pipirranas* (chopped vegetables salad), omelettes, soups, pork sausages, *ollas* (casseroles) and stews.

Typical local dishes that should not be missed include *rabo de toro* (oxtail), *tortilla sacromonte* (Sacromonte omelette), *sopa de ajo* (garlic soup) or a succulent San Antón stew, with broad beans, lard and blood sausage, all prepared with great care. The Albayzin district sticks to tradition with its snails, broad beans with ham and convent cakes.

In short, visitors to Granada will be amazed by the rich, assorted gastronomy of the city. A good way of tasting the typical dishes of Granada is to savour the juicy *tapas* served in the many restaurants and bars across the city.





Above, typical pastries: *pestiños, piononos, roscos de vino* and puff-pastry. Right, roast lamb

La Tarasca procession, during the Corpus Christi celebrations



The mastery and delicate skill of local craftsmen, their attention to detail, the abundance of geometrical and plant motifs and other touches typical of the art of al-Andalus are evident in the arts and crafts of Granada, heir to a tradition that dates back to the Nasrid period.

Granada still has craftsmen plying trades that date back to the times of al-Andalus, such as wood work, pottery, metalwork, jewellery, stone and glass, all part of the Nasrid tradition, as is *Taracea*, a form of inlaid woodwork using shells, mother-of-pearl, metal and multicoloured woods. There are four main styles of local pottery: that inspired by al-Andalus, lustre pottery, the *cuerda seca* style and Fajalauza ceramics.

Feasts

- January 2, **commemoration of the conquest of Granada** by the Catholic Kings
- First Sunday in February, **festivity of San Cecilio**, the city's patron saint
- **Holy Week**, among the most spectacular in Andalusia
- May 3, **Day of the Cross**, when courtyards, streets and balconies are profusely decorated with flowers
- May-June, **Corpus Christi procession and Fair**
- September 29, **pilgrimage to San Miguel Alto** in the Albayzin
- Last Sunday in September, **festivity of the Virgen de las Angustias**, patron saint of Granada

Almuñécar



1. Castle of San Miguel
2. Archaeological Museum
3. Fish Salting Factory
4. Church of La Encarnación
5. Museum "Claves de Almuñecar" (Keys to Almuñecar)
6. Roman aqueduct and thermal baths
7. Pillar in Calle Real
8. La Najarra Mansion
9. Crag of El Santo
10. Almuñecar Gate
11. Roman Aqueduct
12. Torre del Monje Columbarium
13. Monument to Abd al-Rahman I
14. Monument to the Phoenicians
15. Town Hall
16. Municipal Market
17. House of Culture

ⓘ Tourist Information

Tourist Office
Palacete de la Najarra
Tel. 958 631 125

Archaeological Museum "Cueva de Siete Palacios"
Calle San Joaquín - Barrio San Miguel
Tel. 958 838 623

Museum "Claves de Almuñécar"
Calle Puerta de Granada - Casa de la Cultura
Tel. 616 122 913

City History Museum
Castle of San Miguel
Tel. 958 838 623



Panoramic view of the town from San Cristóbal

Aerial view of Almuñecar, with the castle and the fish salting factory in the centre



Located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, Almuñécar's long history dates as far back as the Bronze Age (circa 1500 BC). It has also seen the coming and going of a great variety of civilizations such as the Phoenicians, the founders of the town.

During the Roman period, *Sexi Firmun Iulium* became a flourishing town known all over the Empire for its salted fish and its "garum", a highly sought after fish sauce.

The eight centuries of Muslim rule left an indelible mark on the town. It was then called *al-Munakkab*, from which it took its current name. Muslim Almuñécar became one of the major coastal cities of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada until its conquest by the Christians in 1489, so beginning a new era in the history of this town.



Castle of San Miguel at night

Throughout its three thousand years of history, Almuñécar has been a place where different traditions and beliefs have converged, a space for multiple relationships and interaction.

Its history was made by knights, nobles, merchants, clergymen and seamen, anonymous people who, with their everyday work, forged the special character of this attractive city on the coast of Granada.





Above, a typical street in the old town. Left, seafront area with the crag of *El Santo* in the background



Roman Aqueduct

Visits

The Aqueduct of Almuñécar

The Aqueduct of Almuñécar, one of the largest in Roman Hispania, is almost 11 km long. Five of its sections survive today: the Torrecuevas section and sections I, II and III run through forests of avocado and custard apple trees, a landscape of great beauty that makes a visit to this feat of Roman engineering even more appealing. Declared a Site of Cultural Interest, the Aqueduct has survived the vicissitudes of time, such that some sections are still being used today to irrigate the land.

Almuñécar in the 12th century

"It is a beautiful town where abundant fish are caught and a great variety of fruits collected. In the middle of the town there is a square building that resembles a column: wide at its base and narrow at the top. There are flutings in two of its sides that meet and extend upward. In the angle formed by one of these sides, there is a big pond dug in the ground, which is designed to collect the water conducted from about a mile away by an aqueduct, consisting of numerous arcades built with solid stones. Learned men from Almería assert that water rose to the summit of the obelisk in other occasions and then descended on the opposite side, where there was a small mill. On a mountain that overlooks the sea, there are still some remains, but no one knows their ancient purposes."

Al-Idrisi, geographer (12th c.).
Description de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne

Sugar cane in the coastal areas of Granada

Between the 7th and the 11th centuries, the vast empire ruled by the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties rediscovered the rich agricultural traditions of Mesopotamia, broadly enhanced with plants and techniques from India, Iran and Egypt. After this initial contact, the cultivation of plants such as sugar cane, which was grown in a wide area near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, expanded throughout the new parts of the Empire.

In the 10th century, during the Caliphate of Córdoba, various Arab texts mention the arrival of sugar cane in the Iberian Peninsula. Al-Razi also mentions that it was grown in fields near Almuñécar and Salobreña. In the 16th century, the German traveller Jerónimo Münzer cited the importance of this crop for the economy of the region and the excellent quality of the end product:

"Almuñécar is well-known for the production of sugar. Sugar canes sometimes reach six or seven cubits long and the thickness of the wrist."

Today, the thousand-year-old sugar cane industry on the coastline of Granada has all but disappeared due to strong competition from foreign markets, making sugar farming and production part of the history of this region.



Ancient moulds for making sugar loaves

The Archaeological Museum "Cueva de los Siete Palacios" (Seven Palaces Cave)

The Archaeological Museum is located in a Roman monument, a cryptoportico (covered passageway) dating from the 1st century AD, whose function was to bridge the unevenness of the hill in order to build the forum. The *Cueva de Siete Palacios* (Seven Palaces Cave) has a large dome with seven longwise transepts where interesting archaeological pieces dating from the Algaric era to the end of the Middle Ages are displayed.

Showcase containing Egyptian vases found in the Phoenician necropolis of San Cristóbal. Archaeological Museum





Inside the Archaeological Museum in the "Cueva de los Siete Palacios" (Seven Palaces Cave)

They include Pharaoh Apophis I's funeral urn, dating from the 17th or 16th centuries BC, which contains the oldest written text preserved in the Iberian Peninsula, and perhaps in the western Mediterranean.

The Fish Salting factory

The fish salting factory, of Punic origin, is one of the most important archaeological sites in Almuñécar, where visitors can imagine the grandeur of its Roman past: the temple dedicated to the Goddess Minerva, the water channelled from the aqueduct and the ponds where the fish were salted and the Almuñecar *garum* was manufactured. *Garum* was a highly praised delicacy in Roman times because of its properties, quality and exquisite taste.



Above, an amphora. Right, remains of the fish salting factory of *El Majuelo*





Castle of San Miguel

The Castle of San Miguel

The Castle of San Miguel dominates the town. Archaeological remains dating from the Punic and Roman periods have been found under its walls. However, perhaps its most impressive features are its Muslim buildings (Almohad and Nasrid) and those dating from the end of the reign of King Ferdinand in the 16th century, when the moat, the drawbridge and the imposing entrance façade with four circular towers were built.

During the War of Independence against the French, the castle was bombarded by British troops and reduced to ruins. It was used as a cemetery until recently and now houses the Town History Museum.





Showcase containing Islamic pottery objects. Town History Museum in the Castle of San Miguel



Islamic wall in the Castle of San Miguel

Museum Claves de Almuñécar (Keys to Almuñecar)

Located in the House of Culture of Almuñécar, this Educational Centre explains aspects related to history and culture, customs and traditions, the tropical world, nature and tourism.

There is an interesting tour in a space with an attractive design, in which the visitor will find scale models, interactive resources and interesting old photographs showing the development of the town over the centuries.

Inside the "Claves de Almuñécar" Museum



Surrounding area

There are numerous towns and attractions around Almuñécar, including La Herradura and Salobreña, a gleaming white town atop a great rock that overlooks the sea. Salobreña twists and turns among geraniums and winding streets with an ancient Arab scent. Motril, nestled on a hill at the foot of the Sierra de Lújar, is the second biggest city in the province after Granada.

The wreck of the Spanish Armada in La Herradura

In 1562 a tragic incident happened in the cove of La Herradura, when twenty galleys were shipwrecked in bad weather.

These vessels, under the command of Juan Mendoza, had just left Malaga and were laden down with provisions and with the families of the soldiers fighting in Oran.

This sad event shocked the Spanish Navy in the times of Philip II, and resulted in the death of about five thousand people.



Salobreña with its Arab castle in the background



Typical street in the Alpujarra of Granada

There is also the Alpujarra on the south side of Sierra Nevada, which thanks to its customs, traditions, landscape and ecosystem has been declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. A few kilometres west of Almuñecar are some of the most beautiful caves in Europe, the Caves of Nerja, discovered in 1959, which were created by the formation of vast karstic cavities.



Sunset in the cove of La Herradura





Left, traditional spit-roasted sardines on the Beach of San Cristóbal. Above, Marina del Este

Local cuisine and handicrafts

Some years ago, local farmers began planting tropical crops in this part of the province of Granada. Almuñécar is currently one of the top producers of tropical fruits worldwide.

The most important crops in the area include custard apples, avocadoes, loquats, mangoes and papayas. These fruits, in addition to being a fundamental part of the gastronomy of Almuñécar, play a prominent role in the local economy. The bulk of the crop is concentrated in the fertile valleys of the Seco and Verde rivers which for over a hundred years have proved an ideal place for growing exotic tropical fruits.

The Mediterranean provides the town with delicious fish, the essential ingredient of local dishes. Traditional recipes such as marinades, stuffed squid, salted fish, fish *moragas* (roasted fish) or the popular sardine *espetos* –roasted and grilled on spits on fires lit on the beach.





Assorted tropical fruits grown in Almuñecar

Other Almuñécar dishes include fried pumpkin, toasted semolina crumbs, roasted garlic soup, the *mohína* casserole, fritters and a wide variety of dishes made with tropical fruits, such as ice cream and custard apple pie, avocado mousse with prawns...

As for crafts, there is a long well established tradition of bobbin lace. The *bolilleras* (bobbin-lace makers) organize exhibitions and meetings to keep this magnificent craft alive. Leather goods, esparto and wicker products, basketry, glass and jewellery are also still popular.



Almuñecar Jazz Festival

Feasts

- **Holy Week**. Declared of Tourist Interest, its origins date back to the 16th and 17th centuries when only the image of the Crucified Christ was processed through the streets on its *Via Crucis* (Way of the Cross).
- July. Almuñécar **Jazz Festival**: "Jazz on the Coast". The festival has become the biggest event of its kind in southern Spain, and one of the longest-running international jazz events in Europe.
- August. Fiesta in honour of the **Virgen de la Antigua**, patron saint of Almuñécar. Its origins date back to 1569, the year in which Philip II's army defeated the troops of the Moorish chieftain Aben Humeya when they were trying to take the Castle of San Miguel.

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